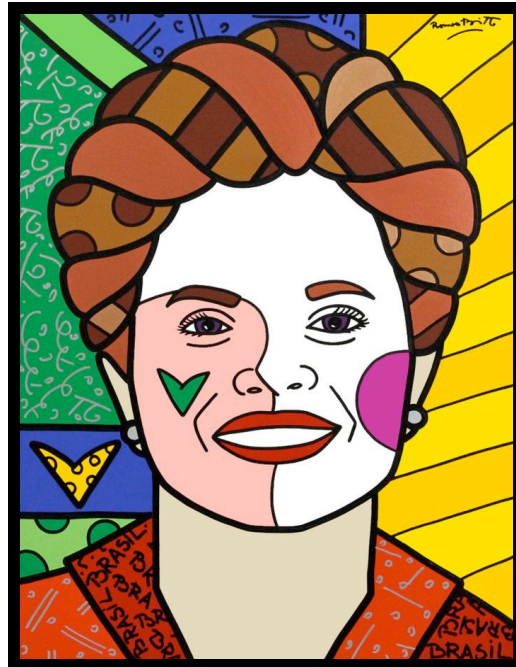


An Online Community as an Alternative Site for Participation in the Art World: A Brazilian Case



Fabiola R. de Andrade
Student number 351342
Email: fabiola@student.eur.nl

Supervisor: Payal Arora
Second reader: Jacob Groshek
Master Program Media Studies
Specialization Media, Culture & Society
Erasmus University Rotterdam
Academic Year 2011/2012

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the online community "Artes Plásticas Brasil" (in English: Visual Arts Brazil), a Brazilian online community focused on art, and its use as an alternative site for participation in the art world in Brazil. As Brazil is increasingly becoming more important in the global art world, it is interesting to explore whether Brazilians are experiencing such art world online, as research had shown most of the population has never set foot in an art museum. The aim of the investigation was to study to what extent the online community worked as an alternative site for participation in the art world. A mixed method approach that encompassed content analysis of the forum, interview of the active participants and a survey was employed, touching on themes such as democratization of knowledge and construction of knowledge online and the construct of social capital online. Results show that the online community is not really serving as an alternative site for participation in the art world in Brazil, but rather, more as an extension of it.

Keywords: online community; participation in the art world; social capital; knowledge construction; Brazilian

Preface

This Master thesis is the final product of my Master in Media Studies, specialization Media, Culture & Society. My aim was to study the construction of knowledge through new media, and in that field, I really wanted to write about Brazil. My supervisor Payal Arora was very supportive of this decision, and then together we managed to shape the topic and make it into something relevant, interesting and new. I am very thankful for all her guidance, constructive criticism and all the encouragement she has given me, this thesis would not have been made without her and all her very insightful feedback and comments.

I also need to thank my dear friend Sila Sarac, for all her support and encouragement since the very beginning of the Master course, and throughout the program, I would not have embarked on this journey were it not for her. My most sincere thank you also to Luciano Dinapoli, who endured stressful moments with me, gave me support and stood by me through it all, I hereby express all my gratitude to him. A big thank you to my dear friend Mariana Marques, who provided me with all her unrestricted moral support despite the physical distance between us. And last, but not least, a special thanks to all my family members and friends, whom I may have neglected at times and, nonetheless, have given me nothing but support and understanding in return.

It has been quite a learning journey for me, full of challenge and discovery; and amidst moments of doubt, tension and incredible amounts of caffeine, I am happy to say that I completed it. I sincerely hope this thesis can contribute to the academic debate on online communities as alternative spaces for participation in the art world, not only in Brazil but also serve as a stepping stone for larger and broader understandings of it throughout the world.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	2
Preface	3
Introduction	5
Literature Review.....	7
Online communities	7
Participatory Culture and Knowledge Construction	9
Brazilian Internet Background.....	12
Taste and Art Appreciation	13
Social Capital	14
Background info on Brazil - Museums and relationship with art	16
Participation in Art.....	17
Research Questions and the Online Community	20
The choice of an Online Community.....	20
The Research Questions	20
Methododology.....	22
Qualitative Content Analysis	23
Research Design.....	24
Interviews.....	25
Research Design.....	27
Online Survey	27
Research Design.....	28
Reflections on the Methodology.....	30
“Artes Plásticas Brasil” – the Orkut community	32
Findings and Analysis	35
-What is the nature of the interactions taking place in the community forum?.....	35
-Who is the user and what motivates them?.....	45
Main Motivations	49
-To what extent is there knowledge construction?.....	54
The Romero Britto debate.....	59
To what extent does an online forum serve as an alternative space for participation in the art world in Brazil?	66
Implications	70
References	71

1. Introduction

Brazil is emerging as a hot market for contemporary art with artists gaining solo exhibitions at prominent museums such as the Tate Modern in London (Financial Times, 2011). Numerous local and esteemed international galleries are currently sprouting across Brazil as well as esteemed international galleries choosing to exhibit the art. Such art is considered edgy, exotic and risqué, internationally as well as within Brazil. For instance, there is the 3000-acre open-air contemporary art museum, Inhotim art Park, which was inaugurated in 2006 and is increasingly drawing international attention (Financial Times, 2011). Also, in 2011, an investment firm launched a USD 24 million art investment fund in Brazil (called BGA - Brazilian Golden art). We can conclude that there is certainly a momentum for art from Brazil (Telegraph, 2011).

Ironically, the Brazilian population does not seem to be directly enjoying and participating in such art developments. According to the last nation-wide census, conducted every ten years by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), that is not the case. Research showed that Brazilians do not go to museums, as 93 percent of the population reported never having set foot in a museum (IBGE, 2008).

Interestingly, a visible trend seems to be growing in Brazil: Internet usage, with increase of Internet access in the general population. Regarding Internet usage rates, even though the number of Brazilians with access to the Internet is still relatively low when compared to developed nations, being currently the sixth in Internet usage (absolute numbers)¹. Brazil recently increased Internet access considerably amongst its population, stemming from recent government policies², but also due to the fact the country seems to finally be catching up after its late Internet adoption (Fragoso, 2006). Brazilians have been using the Internet for work, for study, but also, to socially connect to their peers and the world via social network websites and online communities.

Hence, the present study aims at connecting these dots, by investigating to what extent an online forum serves as an alternative site for participation in art in Brazil. The leading aim of this research is to investigate to what extent the online realm may be providing a space for

¹ Internet World Stats, available at: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/top20.htm>

² The digital Inclusion Federal Project, available at: <http://www.inclusaodigital.gov.br/>

people to consume art and engage on diverse aspects concerning art in Brazil and to gauge the nature of such consumption practices.

From the academic-scientific standpoint, three aspects make the Brazilian case a relevant one for study of an online forum being an alternative site for participation in the art world, namely: 1- the growing national/international importance and attention being paid to the Brazilian art world and its flourishing market, with booming galleries; 2- the increasing Internet access rates in the general population; and 3- the fact that this population is not participating in the art world in traditional ways through museum and gallery visits.

Two aspects prompted the study, one of which being the growth of the online sphere as a space for culture consumption around the world. The other one is the fact that there is in Brazil a considerably large online community focused on art. This community, in particular, has some very active participants in posting new online threads and the number of members being over 41000 is quite impressive. This community presents itself as an appropriate object for investigation, inspiring the and providing empirical data to assess to what extent it might be serving as alternative space for participation in the art world in Brazil.

From the social perspective, the relevance of this study lies on the fact that it adds to the scientific debate of i) the democratizing aspect of the Internet; ii) the interactions and tensions over local and global art issues.

2. Literature Review

In order to situate the study and also the specific Brazilian art online community, placing it in context and bringing to light the relevance of this study pursuit, it is important to understand a few concepts, such as the definition of what constitutes an online community, as well as providing background on the Brazilian Internet context and related concepts. The following sections will provide a framework for understanding and contextualizing the research in a broader academic setting.

2.1. Online communities

Online virtual communities can be understood and defined as Ridings (2002) states:

"Virtual communities have been characterized as people with shared interests or goals for whom electronic communication is the primary form of interaction (Dennis, Pootheri, & Natarajan, 1998), as groups of people who meet regularly to discuss a subject of interest to all members (Figallo, 1998), and groups of people brought together by shared interests or a geographic bond (Kilsheimer, 1997)."Traditionally, the concept of "community" refers to a geographic area such as a neighborhood (Wellman & Gulia, 1999b), albeit in this case the "virtual" part of the term "virtual community" indicates a home having no actual physical place (Handy, 1995). Virtual communities (Hiltz & Wellman, 1997) create "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feelings, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace"(Rheingold, 1993b, p. 5).

They have been present on the Internet for over 30 years now, the first of which being the Usenet groups, widely accepted as the first virtual communities that started in 1979 (Ridings, 2006). Since then, as the number of virtual community sites and their users have increased, such communities have started to be subjects of study by academics.

Even though connection among people via the Internet is key to a virtual community, the notion of a community is not appropriate to all sites of online discourse (Erickson, 1997; Fernback,

1999). Some discussion groups and chat rooms, for example, are just places for people to meet, not having necessarily any sense of permanence or consistency among the members or the discourses (Ridings, 2006).

Furthermore, another aspect of defining a virtual community lies in the frequency with which its members participate in it. Typically, members become attached to their communities and visit them often (Hiltz & Wellman, 1997). Literature does not specify what particular visit frequency makes a member an active one, nevertheless, a virtual community is normally understood to consist of persistently interacting members (A. D. Smith, 1999, as mentioned in Ridings, 2006). Likewise, Figallo (1998) suggests that virtual communities are those where members feel part of a larger social group, sense an interwoven web of relationships with other members, have ongoing exchanges with other members of commonly valued things and have lasting relationships with other members.

Ridings et al. (2002, p. 273) also offer a comprehensive definition of the term "virtual community", one which encompasses the attributes of: "groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism." This definition guides us in the present study. Examples of virtual communities are discussion forums or bulletin boards where the same people participate, on a regular basis, to discuss common interests such as fighting leukemia, collecting stamps, or the issues of owning a Labrador dog, for instance. Since community membership has not been explicitly defined in the literature and since the typical use of the term "membership" deals also with members who do not actively contribute to the community but still take part, even silently, in its activities, this research defines a member of the online virtual community focus of the study as anyone who joined the community at any point in time and is listed in the participant list of such community.

Rheingold (1993) suggests that the logging onto an online community, or checking e-mail and chat rooms is "similar to the feeling the of peeking into the cafe, the pub, the common room, to see who's there, and whether you want to stay around for a chat" (p. 26). In that sense, the online community was "real," as "it was grounded in his 'everyday physical world' (Thomsen, 1998). Rheingold (1993) connects the "rise of virtual communities to the hunger people have for a sense of 'community' as they struggle with the disappearance of informal public spaces in their lives" (Thomsen, 1998).

2.2. Participatory Culture and Knowledge Construction

Scholars have pointed out that the Internet and its participatory culture feature a certain democratizing quality, lowering barriers for participation (Jenkins, 2004; Benkler, 2006).

In this new open-for-all space where in theory everybody has a voice, amateurs are able to not only express their critique and opinions, but also their very own cultural products, i.e. their own art.

Then, if the media convergence (Jenkins, 2004) makes content more readily available, then user created content (UCC) allows the democratization of production, basically: more people can share their ideas, thoughts, art and so on. The participatory culture theory portrays precisely that, as Jenkins et al (2006) phrase it:

A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another. (Jenkins et al. 2006: 3)

Five years after publishing his views on the Web 2.0, O'Reilly, together with and Battelle (2009) state that the *web* is getting smarter, it would be evolved into *Web Squared*, as they called it. Much of the Web Squared notion (O'Reilly & Battelle, 2009) dwells on the assumption that the 'Net' itself is learning, and not only learning: learning faster.

Online community forums provide potential for new forms of collaborative work, study, and community that decrease temporal and geographical barriers. However, levels and kinds of interaction and means by which individuals create new knowledge in such online spaces are not completely comprehended.

Previous studies have used constructivist interaction analysis model developed by Gunawardena, Lowe, and Anderson (1997) to help understand and assess online learning. This constructivist interaction analysis model developed by Gunawardena, Lowe, and Anderson (1997) for analyzing collaborative knowledge has been widely used by academics interested in

online learning experiences on Internet forums (Kanuka and Anderson, 1998; Aviv et al, 2003). The model describes the phases that are attributed to learning development in an online forum.

Then, in order to assess the nature and level of exchange and construction of knowledge in an Internet community environment, previous research has utilized the Social Network Analysis (SNA), which is a “method that quantifies social relations in terms of *network structure* parameters which encode certain causal group forces”. Burt (cited in Aviv, 2003) identified the causal forces encoded in cohesion structures that control shared beliefs and behaviors. [C]ertain *roles* need to be taken on to ensure that group function is uninterrupted [...] Roles affect the distribution of power” among participants (Aviv et al, 2003, p. 2). Hence, this analysis can help identify some roles in order to investigate the social interactions, as there is the assumption that “*cohesion, role and power distribution* control the construction of knowledge” (Aviv et al, 2003, p. 3)

Looking at an online community as an alternative place for participation in the art realm, it is necessary to define what participation in the art world is. For the present thesis, participation in the art world was defined as encompassing two different and complementary perspectives: 1- having (online) access to works of art (i.e. image files, official websites); 2- being able to discuss and make sense of them together with others.

Literature on construction of knowledge online in a virtual community or group touches on theory on Asynchronous Learning Networks (ALNs). Even though the online community is not a formal *learning* network per se, as defined by being part of a formal course, it is useful to draw from this literature in order to place interactions happening in the online community towards the (different levels of) construction of knowledge that might be taking place.

ALN literature (Mason and Bacsich, cited in Aviv et al, 2003) states that: “ALN studies call for a greater research focus on the ways peer interaction determine learning outcomes. The Social Interdependence Theory of Cooperative Learning suggests that interaction processes are determined by how *social relations* among members of the group are designed into the learning environment” (Aviv et al, 2003, p. 2). The detailed model for analysis (Gunawardena et al, 1997) is further described in the Methodology section.

Different from those studies, the present study is not focused on a learning forum per se (as did Aviv, 2003), not even an expert-focused one (as did Gunawardena et al, 1997). So interactions and the level of knowledge construction might not fit precisely with that framework.

Nevertheless, such a model framework will help guide the way into the investigation of the nature of the interactions taking place and shed light on the ways and the extent to which users are (or are *not*) using an online community as an alternative space for participation in the Brazilian art world.

2.3. Brazilian Internet Background

The advent of the Internet in Brazil was rather late, compared to other nations, as it had only been legally available for public use since 1995. Seventeen years later, the number of Brazilians with access to the Internet is still relatively low and they are highly concentrated in the richer urban parts of the country. However, the intensity of *the appropriation of the Internet* (Fragoso, 2006, p.2) by Brazilian users has been incredibly high: in June of 2005, barely 10 years after the advent of the Internet, Brazilian users stayed on-line for longer than the users in any other nation included in the study by Nielsen/Netratings, exceeding the averages for the Japanese and the US users by more than one and two hours respectively” (Fragoso, 2006).

This was quite surprising, as Brazil is currently making efforts to fight the digital divide – i.e. the gap existing between the ones who have Internet access and the ones who do not (Spence, 2008). Official governmental initiatives to increase the number of Internet users in the country range from seminars on Internet literacy, free software crash courses and an array of Internet access points spread across the country offering physical facilities named *telecenters* (Spence, 2008) in order to reach the population who would not have access to the online world otherwise.³

It was also surprising to discover that the Internet is a platform that is being used rather poorly in order to reach out to that part of the population. Taking into account the alarming fact that 93 percent of Brazilians have never set foot in a museum⁴, we can see grounds as to why federal initiatives have attempted to foster the interest for high culture amongst the citizens⁵ providing platforms for both production and consumption of the arts. However, it might be missing out on the opportunity to combine both efforts: Internet access combined with a concern for content quality of the access.

In a visit in the websites of the most prominent Brazilian arts institutions and art museums, it is possible to see that the interactivity taking place there was mainly of the ‘one-to-many’ broadcast-style, which is the type of interactivity most present in traditional media platforms and broadcast models – television as an obvious example. The interaction of the kind

³ The digital Inclusion Federal Project <http://www.inclusaodigital.gov.br/>

⁴ IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) 2008 report

⁵ Brazilian Ministry of Culture <http://www.cultura.gov.br/site/>

'many-to-many', which we can encounter in online social networks, forums, discussion boards and the like is simply not present. Museums websites in Brazil seem to be following the traditional mass media settings, as the one-to-many approach, rather the more interactive and democratic many-to-many with the presence of forums, or even e-learning spaces. Perhaps this could be due to the fact that Brazil, as a country, was a late adopter of the Internet (Fragoso, 2006); or perhaps this could be accounted for in the fact that social inequality and class economical discrepancies do make a difference in the kind of art experience the vast majority of the population can achieve online.

2.4. Taste and Art Appreciation

When dealing with participation in the art world and tensions surrounding the debate of art-related issues, it is important to try and establish a few context guidelines regarding appreciation in art and also the idea of art taste.

When we address the scholarly issue of taste, talking about French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu becomes almost inevitable. Having drawn considerably from Marx's ideas on how society works, Bourdieu (1983) argues that social/economic class plays a pivotal role in a person's cultural taste in society, in one dimension, according to an individual's overall volume of capital and in the second, according to the structure of their capital: social, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their assets (Bourdieu 1989, p.17, as cited in Spence, 2008).

However, not all scholars and not all theories necessarily assume this *capital*-based model as a given to understand taste. For Cohen (1999), "[t]here are high audiences and there are low audiences, and there are works appropriate to each, called, perhaps, works of fine art and works of popular art. But then, to complicate matters: a single person might join both audiences, and thus be an appreciator of both fine and popular art; and a single work might find favor with both high and low audiences" (Cohen, 1999, p. 5).

Concerning art appreciation, B.S. Funch (1997) has described five types of its occurrence (namely: aesthetic pleasure (what is pleasant to look at), art understanding (what one *gets* from it), emotional appreciation (focused on the emotional effect of a piece), cathartic pleasure (very rare) and, finally, the aesthetic experience (the more holistic view of the art). This

research model would then, move away from the definitions of which art is high, which art is low and, more importantly, *what* is high and *what* is low, in order to focus on the experience itself. In a way detached from class-based or value-based definitions, this approach allows for a less politicized interpretation. This can prove itself very useful as well, as mentioned before, while Bourdieu's ideas were too class-based and Cohen's view too subjective, Funch (1997) can provide a fresher framework to investigate the experience of art appreciation.

2.5. Social Capital

An online community is made of real individuals, and by interacting online, those people end up creating social ties with each other, which could be weak ties or strong ones, especially among the active participants of such community.

Academic research in the social sciences and humanities regard social ties as a social resource (Daniel et al, 2003); and such a resource being referred to as social capital. The concept of **social capital** can be summarized by the collective set of benefits that come from the connection and cooperation between individuals and groups. As Daniel et al (2003) point out, social capital has been used as a framework for the understanding and "investigation of issues such as trust, participation, and cooperation" in (temporal) communities.

There is a relationship between online communities and social capital; Daniel et al (2003) posits that "constructivism emerges out of interactions in a virtual community, and a social constructivist epistemology underpins the development of social capital in virtual communities.

Bourdieu (1983, p. 243) defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." Within the general framework of social capital, other capitals have been examined as well, such as cultural capital, economic and linguistic capitals, from which social capital emerges from collective social interactions (Bourdieu, 1983).

Furthermore, Bourdieu continues that the role of capital is a defining variable in the orientation of agents within an overall social space, which is used in the “first dimension, according to the overall volume of capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the structure of their capital, that is, the relative weight of the different species of capital: social, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their assets” (Bourdieu 1989, p. 17). As Lin (1999) puts it, “[t]he premise of social capital is rather simple and straightforward: investment in social relations with expected returns.” (p. 30).

As the rapid proliferation of virtual communities is observed all around the globe, many believe that the Internet is conducive to building social networks and therefore increasing social capital (Kim, 2006). Even though some scholars have a pessimistic take on the use of the Internet for creating community (see also Putnam, 2000), the most common research design employed in these studies has been to examine the impact of going online on social engagement, for example, with regards to social activities in the offline world. So when investigating the use of online communities in order to foster social capital, those studies presented a pessimistic view because social engagement online was not triggering engagement in the offline real, the *real* world. In so doing, a “number of studies have demonstrated that the Internet exerts a limited impact on invigorating social networks and, on occasions, it atrophies Internet users’ social [...] engagement” (Kim, 2006).

Nevertheless, when addressing the concept of social capital pertaining to the online realm itself – and not extrapolating it to offline implications of social capital – theory seems to apply appropriately to interactions in online communities.

Drawing from these structural and content dimensions of social capital it is possible to conclude that there is no single construct called social capital, but rather, social capital can be understood as a composite of different variables, each of which can be interpreted independently. As a working definition, we define social capital in virtual learning communities as a common social resource that facilitates information exchange, knowledge sharing, and knowledge construction through continuous interaction, built on trust and maintained through shared understanding (Daniel, 2003).

2.6. Background info on Brazil - Museums and relationship with art

According to research on cultural practices ("Frequency of cultural practices", System of Indicators of Social Perception - SIPS) in 2010 conducted by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA), 7.4% of people go to museums or monthly cultural centers. With regard to theaters, circus or dance shows the monthly frequency is 14.2% of the people. Attend monthly music shows 18.9% of the population and in theaters frequency is 18.4% (IBGE, 2008 - Institute of Applied Economic Research - IPEA; PNC, 2012)

While the majority of Brazilians do not keep the habit of attending the movies, the minority of Brazilians attends movies only once a year; and almost all Brazilians have never attended a museum or even an art exhibition (UNESCO). 96% of Brazilians do not have the habit of attending museums; whereas 93% have never been to an art exhibition. 78% never attended a dance performance. Only 14% regularly go to the movies. These are the data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). To encourage access to culture and social inclusion, the government is currently deciding on a bill that establishes financial aid to low income people in order to promote attendance to cultural events.

A possible reason for those statistics, possible reason for this might be lack of cultural habits (Marcolini, 2009). On a study based on data from the Household Budget Survey, conducted between 2002 and 2003 by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).

As for 60% of the population that do not allow any fraction of their income to cultural products, it becomes apparent that, more than the cost, the lack of habit is what may be separating those people from consuming culture. People will not have interest in something they have not been exposed before, in something they do not know (Marcolini, 2009). That survey also showed the worrying fact that more than half the population only has access to cultural products disseminated by mainstream media, such as radio and television. However, the study seems to point out that the cultural organizations themselves might be the excluding factor. Cultural activities offered are "often geared to the affluent and therefore, low-income people do not feel part of this universe" (Diniz, as cited in Marcolini, 2009).

Across the country, 53 percent of the population enjoy public-funded cultural initiatives. The Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) found, based on data from the Brazilian

Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), that 82.6 percent of municipalities do not have museums. Most of them (37 percent) located in the Northeast of the country. The survey also states that cultural activities tend to be closer to major centers (major capital cities). Municipalities with more than 100 000 inhabitants, which account for only four percent and include Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, for example, concentrate 74 percent of the cultural consumption in the country (Campbell, 2009), leaving the rest of the country out of the loop, in a way. Physical proximity then is a factor for participation, and the virtual domain becomes more accessible, as it transposes geographical barriers for participation.

In Brazil especially, the federal government, as well as local governments, has consistently played an important role, either through the creation of public institutions or through participation in funding private ones. There was little continuity in the government presence in the cultural area, as governmental initiatives and engagement to cultural institutions did not assure continuing good administration and adequate resources for them (Durand, 1989). Then, Brazil entered the corporate arts sponsoring era without passing through the phase of the wealthy individual support, as it did not have a strong tradition in *high* culture (Durand, 1999), with affluent families supporting individual artists, with patronage or any such type of support.

Also, Brazilian educational system does not place importance in fostering high culture practices over society. Instead, commercial TV, which came rapidly to Brazil (in 1950), has been playing the major role of national integration (Durand, 1999). It is also a country where folk culture is rich, as a result of the multiple ethnicities that make up the Brazilian civilization, spreading across the country in diversified regional contexts. (Durand, 1999)

2.7. Participation in Art

Falk and Dierking (1992) highlight that the "decision to visit a museum involves matching personal and social interests and desires with the anticipated physical context and the associated activities of a museum," and that visitors want to see content in context. From the visitor's standpoint, a museum experience consists of three contexts: personal context, which incorporates personal experiences, knowledge and motivation; social context, which refers to the social environment in which the visit happens; and physical context, which relates to the architecture of the building itself alongside the objects contained within (Schweibenz, 1998).

In a study made in the United States in 1990, Hendon discusses if there are differences between museum visitors and non-visitors. As the data refers to 1990, where the Internet is not the widespread tool it has become today, the comparison between the differences in arts participation live at a museum site and with mediation by media outlets does not include the Internet. However, the study draws some interesting conclusions regarding the use of media as a substitute for a live arts experience (Hendon, 1990). The study refers back to a survey that covered the use of television and other media for arts consumption.

Museum visitors reported greater use of TV for arts programs, followed by classical music performance and plays. Similarly, listening to records showed an even wider difference with museum visitors reporting far more recording listening, particularly to classical music and recordings of staged musicals. "Museum visitors make far greater use of the electronic media for arts consumption and considered all together, the areas of greatest difference lie primarily with classical music listening on the radio, arts programs, and classical music performance on television" (Hendon, 1990). To sum up, it becomes apparent that the greatest distinctions one can make regarding electronic media use between museum visitors and non-visitors lie in the willingness of museum goers to listen to classical music on the radio, watch and hear classical music on television and watch general arts programs such as painting and the like. That study concluded that visitors differ from non-visitors in several significant ways. Most importantly is the variable of education (Hendon, 1990), with museum visitors having achieved substantial higher levels of formal education.

Moreover, another study in the U.S. addresses the issue of possible differences in the public who go to museum and the public who does not, by DiMaggio (1996). Although most previous research on aesthetic taste and activities regarded participation in the arts as a type of cultural capital and emphasized the connection between taste and socioeconomic wellness, that study paper focused the ways in which arts participation is embedded in larger systems of meaning. It investigated "the associations between one kind of artistic participation - art-museum visiting - and individuals' responses to ninety-four questions about their social, cultural, and political values and attitudes". Several differences between U.S. art-museum visitors and others, and concluded that art-museum visitors were somewhat more politically liberal, racially tolerant, and open to other cultures and lifestyles, and much more tolerant and interested in high culture than are comparable non-visitors.

We can assume some of those conclusions based on American audiences might be true

for the Brazilian setting as well, but unfortunately cannot apply such framework or assumptions, as an academic study was never conducted.

For the investigation carried for the present study, nonetheless, it seems true that a factor such as education background might have an influencing force in participation in the art realm in Brazil. Regardless of socio-economical differences between those two contexts, Brazil being a developing country and U.S. situated in the developed world, education levels are expected to feature as an indicator of participation in the art world.

3. Research Questions and the Online Community

3.1. The choice of an Online Community

In order to explore the possibilities of participation in the art realm via an online forum, the goal was to find a community that would provide data to explore how interactions were taking place. An initial idea was looking for such a forum on websites of prominent Brazilian museums. A list of the 34 most prominent Brazilian art museums was compiled based on national recognition and artistic relevance. After analyzing each website it was discovered that none of them featured an electronic forum, or a discussion space for the users to interact. Some of them had an inner session featuring an online tour, or a few works that could be viewed online. However, there was no possibility to upload a comment, a question or a remark, no room for user interactivity.

Having assessed that situation, it became clear that this study would need other sources of empirical materials in order to answer the research questions raised. Then a turn was made in direction of other types of forums, not official, not from an art institution or an art museum, but rather, forums comprised of interested people. People who do art, or like art, who would like to know more about art, who teach some sort of high art form, people who sell it and so on. Suddenly the array of people and a variety of backgrounds came to the foreground. In particular, an art-focused community within the social network Orkut (which will be addressed later in this section) seemed to fit the purpose and requirements of the present study quite well, as it had a considerable amount of members and was active enough for a study.

3.2. The Research Questions

The Research Question that guided the investigation is as follows:

To what extent does an online forum serve as an alternative space for participation in the art world in Brazil?

Sub questions are as follows:

1. *What is the nature of the interactions taking place in an online community?*
2. *What kinds of knowledge construction are taking place in this online art forum?*
3. *Who are the people engaging within this online community and what motivates them to do so?*

Sub Question	Purpose	Method
What is the nature of the interactions taking place in an online community?	To gauge into what ways the users are participating, what is being discussed and how it is being discussed.	Content analysis of the forum.
What kinds of knowledge construction are taking place in this online art forum?	To investigate the extent to which knowledge is constructed in the forum and if / how participants perceive such construction.	Content analysis of the forum; Interviews with active participants.
Who are the people engaging within this online community and what motivates them to do so?	To look at the participant themselves in an effort to get a glimpse of who they are understand their motivations.	Interviews with active participants; Survey.

4. Methododology

In order to address the main research question that guides this study as well as the sub question, the methodology encompasses a mix method design, in order to provide a broader insight on the interactions in the community. Even though there is a clear qualitative approach throughout this study, a survey was incorporated as a method as well, in an attempt to be able to say more about who the user is, by covering more participants. Then it becomes possible to triangulate the results and correlate them to answer the main research question as well as the sub questions, namely:

1. *What is the nature of the interactions in the community forum?*
2. *What kinds of knowledge construction are taking place in this online art forum?*
3. *Who are the people engaging within this online community and what motivates them to do so?*

In order to address the research question of *To what extent does an online forum serve as an alternative space for participation in the art world in Brazil?*, three methodologies were put to practice: interviews, inductive content analysis of the forum and a survey. All the data was collected in Brazilian Portuguese, which is the Author's native language, and then translated into English, for the sake of the study.

Qualitative research on community participants on the Internet allows an unprecedented level of access to what was before unobservable interactional behaviors of individuals, as online data are usually abundant and easy to obtain (Kozinets 2002, p. 62-64). Hence, the "amount of data available forces online ethnographers to make explicit choices about the delimitation of their research question, the place and duration of data collection and the way data will be analyzed" (Schooten, 2010, p.10).

In the following sub sections the used methods will be described, and for each of them, sub headings on Sampling and Research Design, for specific detail on each approach.

4.1. Qualitative Content Analysis

In order to address the sub question *What is the nature of the interactions taking place in the community forum?*, content analysis was carried out in the threads of the online community.

Qualitative content analysis was the chosen methodology to address the nature of the interactions in the community because of its features (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The online data obtained from an open online forum, such as this community, where all one has to do in order to gain access is join such community, constitutes a rather abundant source of data to work with. The approach to dealing with such mass of data was inductive and there was inspiration drawn from grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

4.1.1. Sampling

As the inductive content analysis is based on the forum, a selection of the most relevant threads for this study had to be made. The most popular threads and the least popular threads were looked at, as to explore the differences in popularity, which themes were participants willing to contribute to, and which ones would prove less attractive for participation. As a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to the data was adopted, that has a direct influence on the sampling method.

The community forum was observed and contributions and posts were considered, however as a researcher I did not make any contributions, but merely observed. In a timeframe of one year, the researcher sieved through the forum looking for the most popular threads and unusual unpopular ones as well, measured by number of reply posts. Regarding the threads themselves, it would not be feasible to look at all of them, so the relevant ones for the study were selected and looked at. Some threads were chosen over others taking into consideration features such as the richness of the debates, the volume of participation (or lack thereof) and possible interesting facts, such as a heated argument, for instance.

The majority of empirical data in the forum during the timeframe considered were observed, but not all of it was included in the analysis, due to lack of relevance for the present

study. Inspired by a grounded theory approach, data collection and analysis phases of the project proceed simultaneously (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and the inquiry is shaped by the aim to discover social processes, in a theoretical sampling. As Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 45) explain: “Theoretical Sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal”.

Moreover, as Thomsen (1998) pointed out: “[t]he researcher must participate to achieve that depth of analysis. He or she needs continuity over time. One must learn their codes from the inside by participation. The researcher must effectively gain membership” (Thomsen, 1998), so I joined the community for the period of the making of the study, being able to check the forum on a regular basis. However, I was cautious not to interact in the forum, as I did not want to contribute to the data, but merely be immersed in the forum and observe.

4.1.2. Research Design

An online community forum provides text-based communication, making participant observation here different. The researcher “cannot observe people, other than through their textual contributions to a forum. [...] There are no other artifacts to analyze other than text. Interviewing [...] must usually be done online, again via text”. (Thomsen, 1998). In conducting the content analysis, the focus was qualitative, rather than quantitative. As some of the popular threads have over 9000 posts in them and not all of them relevant and meaningful for this study, the focus was on selecting relevant posts within selected threads and then use them as a source of data.

As a framework for analysis, Henri (as cited in Aviv, 2003, p. 3) provided a detailed model, which was adapted by Gunawardena et al (1997). The model was a five-phase Interaction Analysis Model, focus on answering two questions “What degree of knowledge construction is achieved by the cooperative group?” and “What degree of evidence is there that the knowledge of individual participants changes?”. In this model, the first question is addressed looking for “the dominant cognitive phase in the interaction, and the second question is answered by individual expressions which directly relate to such changes (meta-cognition) or

expressions which demonstrate the application of changed knowledge (Gunawardena et al, 1997).

The model considers that knowledge construction processes proceed through five phases; and, accordingly, should be classified into associated phases of *critical thinking*, namely:

1. Sharing / Comparing knowledge
2. Discover / Explore disagreements
3. Synthesis via negotiating meaning
4. Testing / modifying proposed synthesis vs. schemes, theory, facts, beliefs
5. Proofs of reaching agreements or meta-cognitive admitting change of knowledge.

4.2. Interviews

In order to address the sub question *Who are the people engaging with art online and what motivates them to do so?*, a semi-structured interview topic list was designed. The aim was to get subjects to openly talk about their motivations for using the community.

Semi-structured interview is a method that is purposive and relatively informal, offers higher validity and reliability than a survey, as they are “traditionally analyzed as more or less accurate description of experience, as reports or representations (literally, representations) of reality” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). The method at hand allows a direct interaction and allows for adaptation and follow-up of questions according to the development of each particular interview. They were conducted online, for both convenience reasons but also relevance to the topic as well, as interactions within the forum are carried out online anyway, in order to understand and get insight into the perceptions of a few active community members. Perceptions, attitudes and motivations are normally difficult to measure by other more restrained, fixed methods. “Semi structured interviews are designed to have a number of interviewer questions prepared in advance but such prepared questions are designed to be

sufficiently open that the subsequent questions of the interviewer cannot be planned in advance but must be improvised in a careful and theorized way.” (Wengraf, 2001 p.5)

The interviews took place online and this decision can be justified in a twofold. First, the universe where all the interactions relevant to the study take place is the online realm, i.e. the online community. Even though physical hints such as tone of voice gesture are lost when interview is conducted online, that does not compromise the results, as their online persona is all community members, as well as the researcher can see. Hence, due to consistency, it makes sense to keep the offline self out of the equation.

The interviews are not asocial events. Both interviewer and interviewee bring along their class, prejudices, gender, location in social structure, age, emotions (Wengraf, 2001). And that process happens even in the lack of physical presence. The social self that interacts in the online community and debates in the forum is the one who should be analyzed and not the one who operates offline, that one is not under investigation.

4.2.1. Sampling

In order to work with a meaningful sample of respondents, they were selected according to their level of participation. Subjects were selected based on how active they were on the forum, in the period analyzed. As the majority of the active participants present themselves in the online realm as males, the sample considered that and there were ten males and two females interviewed, including the official moderator of the group. Representative sampling was the method, as invitations to participate in the interview were only sent to the most active participants, selecting them specifically.

Over a year, the forum was looked at, sieving through relevant threads and popular threads were taken into consideration for the study. And on those threads, participants who participated *the most*, the most active, were contacted and invited for an interview. More people were invited than the number of conducted interviews, as not every invited member agreed to take part in the research. Out of the sixteen active members who were invited, twelve accepted to sit for an online interview. Then, twelve interviews were conducted and subjects were selected based on their level of participation on the community - the attempt was to obtain the most active members as interviewees.

4.2.2. Research Design

The interviews were conducted using Instant Messenger tools, namely Skype (using the chat tool, not audio or video) and also MSN (also using the chat feature, not audio). There was a deliberate decision of not including audio or video to the interview set-up, as typing is the way interactions take place in the community. Furthermore, “it is crucial to be aware of the levels of freedom in the self-presentation of individuals, compared to offline reality” (Schrooten, 2010). In that same regard, it must be considered that an online community can enable the creation of online personas, which will differ from offline realities, but that does not matter, as their offline selves is not relevant to the study, which is focus on an online community as a space for interaction. However, “[v]irtual reality” is not a reality separate from other aspects of human action and experience, but rather a part of it” (Garcia et al, 2009). The topic list utilized revolved around topics such as motivations for participation, how they experience the interaction in the online community forum and themselves, their relationship with art.

The ethnography aimed at virtual behavior so it made sense to keep all the interactions mediated by the Internet, especially when triangulated with observation of the forum dynamics and my own active participation, as a participant member as well.

The operationalization of such key concepts, in the selecting of the interview questions involved asking questions such as “*Do you feel you have learnt something in the community?*” and so on.

The complete topic list utilized to carry out the interviews can be found in the appendix.

4.3. Online Survey

In order to address the sub question of *Who are the people engaging with art online and what motivates them to do so?*, an online survey questionnaire was developed.

Based on the results of the interview, the Author was able to compile a questionnaire which encompassed answers provided by the community participants themselves. The content of the survey was based on the findings of the previously conducted interviews: thus, the questions and possible answers necessarily represent arguments and attitudes of the respondent group as they have been expressed earlier by active participants in the interview. This way the gathered data provides a more accurate result as it enables a more relevant and realistic expression of the respondents, compared to a questionnaire that would be designed by the Author based only on literature.

4.3.1. Sampling

The link to the survey was posted on the forum and participants had to voluntarily click it or not, so the sample was a non-probabilistic one. However, as the link was posted on the forum itself, members would only see it if or when they checked the forum, making the sample more likely to be comprised of actual active community members and, more importantly, active community members, as they had to actually access the forum to see the link. By completion, the survey was able to collect n=116 complete answers.

4.3.2. Research Design

Using the software online tool Qualtrics (<http://www.qualtrics.com/>), it was created a questionnaire with 18 questions. The questionnaire format allowed insertion of skip logics, which allowed for a redirection of the respondent to the next relevant question, according to their answers, therefore not all 18 questions were asked to every respondent, as the questions were being presented according to each individual response choice. The link to the online survey was posted in the community forum, alongside a brief introduction of the researcher and her goals. The survey was open for collecting responses for 45 days, during which time the Author posted reminders asking for collaboration from potential respondents in the above-mentioned thread.

The questionnaire started with a confirmation that the respondent indeed took part in the online community “Artes Plásticas Brasil” and then proceeded to ask the frequency with which the forum was accessed. The question was operationalized in a format of asking about behavior, not declared preferences, e.g., the timeframe of one year was included in the

question, asking the respondent to consider the previous 12 months when answering how often they accessed the forum.

Then a question about participants' motivation for taking part in the community was included. It is important to note, that, in a similar fashion to all the other questions in this questionnaire, it was a closed question with given options and an *Other* option, with a text field next to it. The options for this question, regarding the motivation for their participating in the community, were all taken from the interviews, often times worded in a similar way that the respondents did. In this question there was no limit of options, respondents were able to check as many reasons as they thought fit for participating.

Also, a Likert scale format (Carifio & Perla, 2007) type of question was included, in order to try to measure the overall impressions of respondents regarding the community and their perceptions of it. They were asked to grade the productiveness of debates, learning new things, making new social contacts and also if they felt the community offered its members a way to participate in the art world. There were five points in that scale, ranging from *totally disagree* to *totally agree* and a neutral stance in the middle.

In the questionnaire, respondents were also asked about their offline art habits. In the same way as before, questions specifically referred to the period of the previous 12 months when inquiring about frequency they had attended an art museum or gallery. Then they were asked about their reasons for their art museum or gallery visits (or lack thereof), also with an option for *Other* followed by a field for text entry. Furthermore, because of the focus on the online community as an *alternative* site for participation in the art world, a question was included regarding their participation in any offline art-related groups; and if they did, there was a field that enabled text entry so they could elaborate.

And the last part of the questionnaire encompassed demographics questions, concerning age, sex, occupation, nationality, country and city where they lived, education and income. The complete questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

4.4. Reflections on the Methodology

The mix methods approach was developed to help obtain a fuller picture of the interactions taking place in the online community forum, minimize information gaps and strengthen the reliability and of the study. However, even so, some issues need to be mentioned. Regarding the interviews, specifically, I realize that I contribute and generate data as well, however, efforts were made to minimize such shortcomings of this particular method, for example, making sure the questions asked were open enough to allow respondents to interpret and share information they thought relevant and not skewing them towards one specific response.

Also, another issue that must be mentioned is the efforts in keeping the authenticity of the meaning when dealing with translated data. As all the data collection was done in Brazilian Portuguese, it is crucial to acknowledge the pitfalls which can appear when dealing with textual information in two different languages: the empirical materials in Brazilian Portuguese and the body of literature, as well as compiling and analyzing being done in English.

One of such pitfalls is the absence for corresponding words that carry the equivalent meaning in both languages, for instance. Also, the influence of grammatical style and choice of words are aspects that may affect the authenticity of the materials when managing data, and when those are lost or slightly modified by the act of translating them, that may ultimately compromise reliability of the results (Twinn, 1997).

In order to try and compensate for that pitfall, the use of one single translator for all the materials analyzed - i.e. the forum content, the interviews and the surveys - can maximize the reliability of the data (Twinn, 1997). Therefore, the Author herself translated all the content, as the use of other translators or coders may compromise the data validity and reliability even further.

It appears that researchers who can translate themselves are automatically best situated to do cross language data analysis (Temple & Young, 2004). Furthermore:

“The researcher/translator role offers the researcher significant opportunities for close attention to cross cultural meanings and interpretations and potentially brings the researcher up close to the problems of meaning equivalence within the research process. But as we have illustrated, this researcher/translator role is inextricably bound also to the socio-cultural positioning of the researcher, a positioning, whether intended or

ascribed, that will also give a meaning to the dual translator/researcher role. That meaning shifts with insider/outsider status (Edwards, 1998; Jones and Pullen, 1992; Stinson, 1994) and is in turn linked to how the validity of the work is itself constructed.” (Temple & Young, 2004 p. 168)

4.5. “Artes Plásticas Brasil” – the Orkut community

The community selected for this study is called *Artes Plásticas Brasil* (Portuguese for ‘Visual Arts Brazil’) with approximately 41,139 group members; and is hosted on the social network site called Orkut (<http://orkut.com>). Discussions take place in Brazilian Portuguese language, hinting to the fact that the majority of its users are from Brazilian descent. This specific online community was chosen because it is very active, with new posts being created almost on a daily basis, as well as new threads, offering a rich array of materials to research to focus on.

Furthermore, as it has very low barriers of participation, it tends to allow users from all sorts of background to take part, ranging from art experts to students and people who simply like art. Initiated by a user who was interested in art, which can be inferred from his personal profile on the social platform.

The community is inserted in a social network site. In order to define what that means in this study, the definition by Boyd and Ellison (2007) seems appropriate:

“We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 2)

This social networking site owned and operated by Google Inc. Released in 2004, it soon found a welcoming virtual audience in Brazil. In Brazil, it became the predominant Social Network Site (SNS) to this day, despite the advent of Facebook. One of its main features are the *communities* with a forum where any community member can start threads or reply to existing ones, in which online discussions take place. Despite being an international website and primarily being found in the United States, Orkut was quickly adopted by Brazilian users. Since 2008, because of the number of users, it has been managed by Google Brazil.

The social network site currently has more than 100 million active users worldwide. Anyone who is 18 years old or older and has access to an Internet connection may join, however, there is no guarantee that under-age users will not join, provided they lie about their age.

While in the rest of the world, Facebook has become the most popular SNS, the one that invokes internationality and the most number of users,⁶ with more than 800 million active accounts, in Brazil Orkut maintains its position as the social network site to go to when ones to interact with people and discuss topics in community threads, browsing through their friends photos and interests or simply reading through community forums.

Brazilians are broadly regarded as sociable and gregarious (Morais & Rocha, 2005) and that alone might have been reason for a social network site to thrive in Brazilian land, as this was the first of its kind to become widely available. As expected, a considerable amount of communities within Orkut, from monolingual – using English as *lingua franca* – were soon being forced to become bilingual to accommodate all the Portuguese-speaking Brazilians (Fragoso, 2006).

Another factor that contributed to explain the widespread presence of Brazilians in Orkut is that its release coincided with government's efforts to bridge the digital divide in its territory, in an attempt to provide Internet connection for the population at no cost with the creation of so-called *telecenters* (Spence & Munoz, 2008). The waves of new Brazilian users who had just become web literate found in Orkut an irresistible platform for interaction. For those, Orkut was the point of entry to the online realm and consequently, foster fidelity to this specific SNS.

A few studies were conducted in order to try and ascertain why Orkut was so attractive to Brazilians. As a hypothesis, the cordiality and sociability inherent to Brazilian culture could be behind the high rates of adoption Orkut experienced in Brazil. Users were adding friends just for the sake of it, random unknown people they were reluctant to decline friendship with, so requests for friendship were almost always being accepted, as a sign of courtesy towards others (Morais & Rocha, 2005). As a result, the networks were growing exponentially – what is called *the network effect*, where the value and attractiveness of a service increases as more users adopt it. It became the official Brazilian social network, and Brazilians were happy to have taken over this former English-based site (Fragoso, 2006). As Castells points out the irony, “the age of globalization is also the age of nationalist resurgence, expressed both in the challenge to established nation-states and in the widespread (re)construction of identity on the basis of nationality, always affirmed against the alien” (Castells, 1998, p.27 –as cited in Fragoso).

Orkut sprouted many communities within its platform, and any user was able to create one. “Artes Plásticas Brasil” was created in many of the communities under this social network

⁶ www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics

site, rather than used as groups to discuss a particular subject, were simply listed in the profiles as a badge, a way to build an identity (Recuero, 2004, Frago, 2006). This usage, popularized today can be seen through the little interaction that occurs in many of these communities, whose exchange of information is essentially less than the amount of people in the group (Recuero, 2006).

In many cases these communities function as a badge indeed, as something to be added to the persona they want to build, and record little or no discussion. MocoLim (2007) found that communities with greater participation are communities that have links with local ties (real) daily, which are established offline by users (Moreira, 2010).

Hence, often times the community itself is seen by users as buttons or badges, added to a user's profile. This is justification as to why so many people clicked the 'join' button but so few take part actively in the forum. Of course one would never be able to measure how many of those could indeed be following the discussions and debates in the forum, because if they do not act by posting a comment, there is no way of knowing if they have been there or not.

That explains the fact that the community "*Artes Plásticas Brasil*" has over 40.000 members, but via observation of the forum, it is safe to say that approximately about 0.5% are actively engaging and have been that way for the past years. This asymmetry of activity seems to be common in online communities (Rafaeli, 2004). Even when participation in the activities is crucial for a community's survival and development, many members prefer lurking, that is passive attention over active participation; and "[o]ften, lurkers are the vast majority" (Rafaeli et al, 2004, p.10).

Regarding the origins of the community "*Artes Plásticas Brasil*", it was created on 18th March, 2004, just over a month after the release of Orkut. That could serve as indication of the need of such outlet for users to discuss art in Brazil, as the community has always had the Portuguese language as default, from day 1. In the introductory text that describes the group, it says: "*Painters, illustrators, sculptors, artists in general who use the forms and colors as forms of expression!! Drawing, Painting, Screen, Sculpture, Acrylic, Charcoal, Digital Art...*". The intention appeared for the community to be a forum for artists (professional or amateurs) only. However, as the community grew it developed to be a forum broader than that, where non-artists would interact with artists (self proclaimed, hobbyists, and whatnot).

5. Findings and Analysis

As a broader understanding of the forum, certain broader patterns appear.

This section is divided into three main headings, according to the guidance of each of the research sub questions. Data collected in the survey, in the interview and in the content analysis of the forum will serve as illustration of the main findings and innate understandings of the online community.

5.1. -What is the nature of the interactions taking place in the community forum?

Overall, the nature of the interactions on the community is democratic in the sense that the forum provides an avenue for participation in the art world. As there are no requirements for participation, anyone may click the 'join' button and become a member. Nevertheless, there is a sense of hierarchy, in which some participants' contributions seem to be of more value than others, which is the case of older members and more active ones, whose posts appear to have more weight than from others.

Interactions taking place in the community forum varied according to the topic being addressed, and also according to who initiates or contributes to a thread. There is a clear group of active contributors who seem to dominate most of the interactions. New members or less active ones often try to join in the conversation, but their contributions end up being far less popular, both in level of agreement and in amount of responses.

The nature of the conversation is usually very informal and often times, over-friendly, with nickname calling and somewhat of a perceived forced intimacy; almost as if it depended on the expansion of each participant social capital to be able to demonstrate friendliness and social skills.

An outsider would have difficulty in order to understand what interactions are taking place, as usually the threads reference previous ones or users reference participants that are no

longer present in the community.

A lot of curious participants eventually make their way into ongoing conversations, only to be solemnly ignored. There is a clear hierarchy of who gets to speak their minds and the ones who have to listen and learn. Moreover, we can observe interaction of different types of users, higher educated exchanging thoughts with lower educated users, which can be assessed based on users choice of words and, of course, their own presentation of their online self to the group.

One of these active *popular* members – not only the ones who trigger the most replies, but also the most agreeing replies – has initiated a thread meant to be a place for open, random interaction (as in not necessarily art related).

The take of Rheingold (1993) comparing online communities to stepping into a café or a bar finds perfect resonance in this specific thread, that has been going on for years in the community and is named “Bar das Artes”, in English: *The Bar of the arts*, or the *Arts’ Café*, so to speak, where participants can go for a chat. Having started in May 1, 2009, this thread is by far the most popular in the forum, with 9766 individual reply posts. The initial post in this “Bar” thread, inviting others to join in, stated:

Roni:

“Bar of the Arts”:

Place your beer next to the computer and let's do some bar talk. You suggest the topic, or get on the chat from someone, it is an opportunity to say things you always wanted to say and had no opportunity. Who will be the first?”

This thread seems to serve as a space to create more selective social capital, as it is based on innate understandings of people who are interested in art are of a particular “type” that qualifies for this particular community, for this particular type of interaction. As the thread asks for collaboration, it may seem that the member is actually requesting random posts, but in fact, another interpretation may be that he is simply looking for increasing social capital and as the thread develops, it is indeed what ends up happening.

There is also a thread titled “Art News” where participants post art-related news as a form of keeping the thread going but do not necessarily start meaningful discussion around it. It could be compared to a notice board, which you can consult about events, exhibitions, workshops and so on. The content of such news or even their relevance is usually not

questioned, and contributions in that thread tend to be not-interactive, one post not necessarily relating to the previous one, no dialogue, just the sharing of information.

Furthermore, in that same notion, there are a few event organizers who use the community forum as advertising space for their events, prompting the community moderator to start a thread called “*Advertising*”, where she would place those loose threads. This, according to her own justification, was done to keep the forum clean and easy to consult.

The community has a moderator; and the role of the moderator herself seems to be very tied to up keeping, in a sense, in order to maintain the forum organized, without spam and keeping it from totally unrelated topics, such as too much focus on politics. Regarding the rules of conduct of the forum regarding interactions and contributions per se, the role of the moderator was never really clear, leaving interactions continue to the point where participants themselves would solve eventual conflicts. In the following excerpts and throughout the Analysis section, it is possible to see some really heated arguments taking place, however, the presence of the moderator is not noted. By reading the forum carefully and throughout a longer period of time, though, it is possible to infer that she may be moderating it in the background, meaning, addressing participants individually via private messages, but hardly ever in the forum itself.

This passes the idea that as long as conversations and interactions are indeed revolving around art, then there is no problem, even if insults arise. There is virtually no moderation control in that regard.

Furthermore, in the forum it is very common to see struggling amateur artists or young artists trying to *make it* in the Brazilian art world. Also, it is typical to see some more experienced artists giving out advice on how to make it, or even self-proclaiming their elledged success in the Brazilian art world. It is common to see conversations surrounding that, topic as the following quote:

Genivaldo

Instead of complaining about contemporary art and the market, focus your efforts on you guys, conquer your space for what you guys consider art.

Social capital is valued and often times can lead to economic capital as well, making that a very compelling reason to participate, make oneself known and noticed:

Here you find everything, people who "think" they are artists, without even the slightest notions of what is art in itself and its goals, and you can also find true talents that owe nothing to reputable artists, many of them are already in my site and working with me, others work with me on specific projects.

However, some of those struggling-artist related comments can become quite belligerent and confrontational, as one can see in the following quote. The contextualization for the rant was that this user was being questioned on the legitimacy of the art he does, as a commercial provider of replicas:

David

SO... And with my work, I can then participate in this market for REAL.

SELLING REPLICAS, and providing services to active artists, MARKETING, that respect the knowledge that this activity requires and the technological leap forward.

I DO NOT NEED this community to pay my bills.... you must be really stupid to think this.

And you do. LOL.

Among almost 44,000 participants, but found several talents, and whenever I can spread them, and fight for them, EVER.

It is not easy ... but I'll try and seek help. On top of all ... YOU innocently mention that one was expelled, and is now exhibiting know where.

LOL. It would be Rovenzo? Laughs again. LOL.

YOU JONAS; want to exhibit in the Louvre? if you want and have the MONEY, I refer you to the right person OK? you pay a few euros, then put the photos on your Orkut profile.

You do not even need TALENT. LOL.

And you will receive many 'congratulations'. LOL.

Do we need to continue...?

Long live the true art.

This user was trying to justify his place in the art world, as a commercial supplier of replica works, it appears he was seeking legitimacy and fighting for his legitimacy in the market, but while doing so, he attempts to downplay artists who cannot make profit of their work as artists, at the same time as defending the ones who do make a profit with their art without having to resort to networking and paid exhibitions. This participant seems to be trying to incorporate all the social capital he needs in order to maintain his reputation as a. successful and b. working with real art, with his replica works.

This can be interpreted as quite a risky move, as attacking people in the forum might actually cause him to lose social capital. However, because this user is of the most active ones and has consistently been participating in the forum for the studied timeframe of a year, by doing so, he somehow seems to manage to come off as communicative, interactional and knowledgeable.

The bonding and praising of the participants who are active and may as well be called the 'heart-and-soul' of the community also works when dissing someone's work. This happens as if it was simply not possible to join the *clique* of the popular participants, in some level, unless they clearly invite you, as illustrated by the next quote. In this quote another very active user is answering a question by a new participant regarding the possibility to start learning how to draw at the age of 30, without having a *gift* for it, nor talent, very possibly a former *community lurker* trying to make his first contribution to the forum:

CANVAS:

Look if you do not know how to draw, no gift or ability etc. and such, AND WANT TO LEARN TO DESIGN, MAKING LITTLE COMIC KID LANDSCAPES and some recommend doing a music course with a specialty in TUBA or maracas.

And then do a post-graduate HOW TO MAKE WATERMELON JUICE.

Got it??

David:

LOL. I have so much fun here.

but it is cool support. LOL

I wanted to be a juggler...

do you think I can manage? LOL

Also, the following excerpt was posted right after another 'newbie' posted a link to one of his/her own works of art. The participant asked for feedback from the older, most experienced community members. As a result, the following message was posted on the thread with a declared intention of mockery:

Helio:

Good morning.

I've seen better work. LOL

But everything is a matter of one's opinion. Here in Recife, the guys are so far getting the most fun, because Santa Cruz football team is part of the Brazilian D series (no E Series). And then, to Pernambuco in general when they win something against Sao Paulo is the same as when Brazil beats Argentina. Got it???

The previous excerpt constitutes an example of an active user dissing other's work, a non-active user posting for the first time. With the laughing and shifting the conversation focus towards football, the user addresses and ridicules a non-active participant, perhaps a former lurker, who showed their work on the forum for the first time, in an indication that their art was not important enough to be even discussed, if such an interpretation can be drawn.

Such types of interaction can render the community forum a rather unfriendly space for a less active member or a new member to take part. There seems to be an implicit rite of passage indeed, when one can only actively comment, post and display their opinion, once they have passed such rite. Just as a newcomer coming into a pub full of locals for the first time, less

known members are often discouraged from posting and commenting in the forum threads, as the likelihood of being mocked for their opinions or even their work seems to be high, as illustrated with the previous examples.

When one of the participants draws the attention to the fact that this invisible *clique* exists, this is what he says (emphasis by the Author):

Jonas:

What is happening here is a farce, because there is no dispute over art as a whole, but just personal taste.

Banned people for disagreeing with our views, spoke ill of a painting of a blond child with the title of "Brazilian Kid", why? If the guy grew up in a corner of Santa Catarina, settled by Polish immigrants, the child could not be Brazilian blonde?

Another day, member Sarita appeared, was massacred, threatened to be banned? And she was not wrong at all, asked to forgive and forget and nothing, she gave up.

Helio began with the half confusion also, retraction was requested, etc.

You call people here failed artists, that in a nutshell. This community only has 5 or less real artists, in your opinion.

This community does not represent anything for the arts in Brazil, Orkut is nothing, our opinions are nothing in this world.

But when someone in here intends to present a new idea, a new chat, then the whole thing always gets out of hand.

Also in the theme of using the community as a trampoline or struggling artists, it is common to see instances of explicit self promotion taking place, which seems to indicate a rather clear goal in using the community to build social capital and further, make it into real life economic capital.

David:

Andrea, I do not know if you know this, but I work with reproductions on canvas.

Known as Giclee, but my system is better than that.

Check my website: www.XXXXXXXX.com.br

I work a lot with replicas of the great masters.

And I try to deploy a project with schools in 50x70 cm screens.

With the original image exactly like the original.

With 25 screens. (Masters)

Imagine how wonderful students to see it live.

And they have the 25 available screens.

for studies and readings at the school.

In the previous excerpt one can see one active member interacting with another, talking "business". By making this interaction available and visible to the whole of the online community, it appears both participants seem to be forging a relationship that builds on both persona's social capital. It continues in the following quotes:

David:

DON JUAN

Very good.

I'll show this to some people, I'll keep you posted.

Don Juan Marti:

DAVID

Thank you.

David:

DON'T THANK ME MY FRIEND, WE ARE PARTNERS.

And congratulations, because I compared the original with its N6, and our work to your is much better, has more mass, more concentrated color.

Let's move on.

Praising for the sake of praising in an attempt to build community within the community, courteous feeling, but we must note that this only happens if the community knows you already. This type of interaction normally might not take place with a newcomer.

Helio:

Congratulations Paulo!

Your work is amazing, a wonderful work. Much success to you because you deserve it.

Congratulations.

David:

GREAT Paulo!

Congratulations ... other prizes await you.

A lot of participants posting images of pieces of work, to get feedback on it and it often seems they are simply fishing for compliments, one may say, judging by the little contextualization given, as often they post their own works of art for the community to assess and assign value.

Beyond that, the forum does behave as a community in the sense that more attention is paid to regular contributors than to want to show newbies that their work, often times ignoring solemnly newcomers contributions altogether.

5.2. -Who is the user and what motivates them?

In this section there are parts of ongoing conversations in the forum itself and also statements made in the interviews by active participants. Also, some data from the survey is used in the analysis as well.

The active user of the community In the impressions of the moderator herself:

Arts In Brazil, the people in it is quite diverse. Most are people who like art and just hit the button to join. (making out the 40.000) Otherwise it is composed of: Amateurs who make art as a hobby, Pseudo-amateur (very simple people, who have no training and do not necessarily work with a good technique, but are usually quite simple to use art as a way to stand on a low income... and do not have much interest to improve the work...; Some arts students, or teenagers who want to decide whether or not to pursue the arts as a profession; Applied arts professionals, as David, who works with Giclee reproductions, and he said, some scouts and dealers who stay quiet but just lurking and looking at what is happening, or find some "future exponent" or promising artist; artists with a capital, very good living and survive the profession (I hope I fit in this category in a few years) ;-)

Within this latter group is where the community gains, where we can discuss the history of art, hear technical points of view, discuss recent developments in the arts, etc. etc. besides being able to exist, because lately without marketing it is a little tricky.

It is interesting to note that the moderator herself recognizes the bulk of the participants "just hit the button to join", but do not necessarily take part in interactions, as literature suggests (Recuero, 2005; Moreira, 2010), as if those members want to have this virtual community displayed in their online profiles in a similar way as if it were a collector item (Recuero, 2005), not really used for any particular task, but as a display of one's interests.

From another user, in the interview:

I estimate more than 90% of the participants are not artists [...] But in the end, every human being is a potential artist.

It appears that this estimate might not be far from the truth. From the online survey, it is possible to confirm that even though one can read in the community description that it was originally aimed at artists or aspiring artists, in reality, the profile of the active user is much more varied than that. When asked what is their relationship with art, participants answered:

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Teacher / instructor	11	9%
2	Commercial / supplier	10	9%
3	Artist	14	12%
4	Curator	0	0%
5	Critic	0	0%
6	Personal interest	50	43%
7	Student	5	4%
8	Hobby	17	15%
9	Other	9	8%
	Total	116	100%

Table 1

Regarding gender, the difference between respondents was fairly balanced (53% male, 47% female), and age ranged from 16 years old to 77 years old. However, neither sex or age showed relevance when cross-tabulated with the dependent variables. Even though female identified members seem to contribute less in the forum threads that were looked at, it appears they are indeed present and checking the forum mostly as readers, and not so much as contributors, based on the authors of the posts. It is possible to infer that because self-identified females do not contribute so often, but still, they saw the link to the online survey, clicked it and answered it, which indicates they accessed the forum in that period of time and, hence, are indeed lurking the community (Rafaeli et al, 2004).

The large majority of respondents were of Brazilian nationality, as the interactions in the forum had indicated, and in the cases where participants were not Brazilian, they were living in Brazil in the previous year.

When asked whether they had visited an art museum or art gallery within the previous 12 months, 97 percent answered affirmatively. From those, it was then asked how many times had visited in the last 12 months. Responses were as follows:

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Once	11	10%
2	2 to 3 times	35	31%
3	3 to 5 times	28	25%
4	5 to 10 times	18	16%
5	More than 10 times	20	18%
	Total	112	100%

Table 2

It is interesting also to note that, when asked about their reasons for attending a museum, apart from interest in a determined artist (67 percent) and affordability/gratuity of the entrance fee (44 percent), respondents also mentioned tourism as an influencing factor for visiting an art museum or gallery. That is interesting because, in a way, it helps to transpose the geographical barriers and the fact that museums and galleries are not available equally throughout the country; as this data shows respondents are willing to take opportunities when they travel to visit museums and galleries at their destination, within or outside the country.

Respondents were asked if they took part in any study group or discussion group, which does not take place through the Internet (i.e. offline), which was not directly related to their work or study. From their responses (see below), it is possible to infer that they are using the online community as an alternative space for debating and discussing, as the minority has a fixed offline group for that.

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	14	12%
2	No	101	88%
	Total	115	100%

Table 3

5.2.1. Main Motivations

From the interviewees, it has become clear that the active participation in the group is strongly related to the geographical region they are based in. While we have learnt that the bulk of Brazilian's contemporary art scene is based on the larger cities – mainly Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and that active participants are seldom from those places. Thus, the community becomes a way of overcoming geographical distances and democratizing participation in the Brazilian art world. Regarding motivations for taking part in such a community, one interviewee mentions as his motivation:

Being connected is essential for me, because here in the far northern region of Brazil and geographically difficult physical mobility but through the net, the world's there at your fingertips, and an example of this is this very interview. And especially in the case of the community, can exchange ideas with other artists, find out What's going on in the rest of the country, ask more experienced artists for information, a true exchange of experiences.

When asked why they participate in the online community, the slight majority of respondents indicated they do so in order to be kept up-to-date with the art world in Brazil, with 58 percent. Also, there is an almost equally high response rate of participants being interested in the international world versus just Brazil. This can be an indicator of the global nature of participants, as even though they are Brazilian or live in Brazil, they take interest in the international art world almost just as much as in their own inner art world. The total responses are as follows:

#	Answer	Response	%
1	To be kept up-to-date about the art world in Brazil (art production, events, exhibitions, etc.)	58	50%

2	To be kept up-to-date about the art world, internationally (the market, international trends, etc.)	46	40%
3	To promote my work and find possible professional contacts (networking)	26	22%
4	To debate and argue over art related concepts	30	26%
5	To exchange information and experiences	36	31%
6	To learn and/or broaden my technical or theoretical knowledge	35	30%
7	To make new friends or contacts	22	19%
8	Other	7	6%

Table 4

On a Likert scale designed to measure the perceptions towards the community's ability to provide learning, social contact and a sense of community, the majority respondents indicated that mostly they have learnt new things in the community.

#	Question	Totally disagree	Partially disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Partially agree	Totally agree	Responses	Mean
1	I think the discussions on the forum	3	7	25	56	25	116	3.80

	are productive, in general.							
2	I have learnt new things in the community.	3	4	17	45	47	116	4.11
3	I've made new social contacts through the community.	11	7	32	22	44	116	3.70
4	I feel that the community offers its members a way to participate in the Art world.	6	7	24	39	40	116	3.86

Table 5

Statistic	I think the discussions on the forum are productive, in general.	I have learnt new things in the community.	I've made new social contacts through the community.	I feel that the community offers its members a way to participate in
------------------	--	--	--	--

				the Art world.
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5
Mean	3.80	4.11	3.70	3.86
Variance	0.87	0.92	1.67	1.25
Standard Deviation	0.93	0.96	1.29	1.12
Total Responses	116	116	116	116

Table 6

When asked about the highest educational level completed, most of the respondents answered they hold a Bachelor degree, which confirms the literature as it shows higher educated people seem to have higher levels of participation in art. The total chart for this question can be seen below:

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Primary school	1	1%
2	High school	13	11%
3	Vocational school	13	11%
4	Bachelor degree	62	53%

5	Master degree or PhD	27	23%
	Total	116	100%

Table 7

This seems to agree with the literature when it points out that participation in art tends to be higher among people with higher levels of education, making educational background a good indicator of participation in the art world.

Respondents were asked if they took part in any study group or discussion group that does not take place through the Internet (i.e. offline), and was not directly related to your work or study. Interestingly, the majority of the respondents, comprising 88 percent, stated they do not. This seems to indicate that the online community may indeed be serving as an alternative space for participation in the art world, as only 12 percent claimed they engage in discussions about art outside the online realm.

Also interesting to note is that the vast majority of the respondents (97 percent) had been at least once to an art museum or gallery in the previous 12 months. That points out to the fact that the people engaging with art in the offline world – those 7 percent that showed in the IBGE National Census 2008 as opposed to the vast majority of the Brazilian population not having ever set foot in a museum – may indeed be virtually the same people participating in the art world online, of course, if that extrapolation can be made. And that seems to make the participation in the art world via the online community more as an *extension* of the offline world per se than as an alternative to it.

5.3. -To what extent is there knowledge construction?

In this section there are snippets of ongoing conversations in the forum itself and also statements made in the interviews by active participants.

Apart from the content analysis of the forum itself, it is interesting to note that the perceptions of the participants also tend to corroborate the notion that knowledge construction as well as the phases of critical thinking (Gunawardena et al, 1997) tend to stay in the low levels. The following excerpt was taken from one of the interviews:

One interviewee states:

The great thing about this is the stubbornness of some people totally misinformed and want to prove that all costs are certain, even with all the evidence and evidence to the contrary, people who try to defend their position at all costs, even if it is indefensible, just because they cannot understand the subject, contemporary art is a good example, most do not understand and are repeating the same all the time for empty criticism to justify their own ignorance.

The overall impression of the forum seems to be one of arguments, debate and constant conflict, as literature refers to it being on the low levels of knowledge construction (Gunawardena et al, 1997). The fact that higher levels of knowledge construction are not being reached is not necessarily a negative, though. After all, the forum does foster those debates, even though a conclusion is seldom reached. Debate themes range from personal taste to certain painting techniques, also encompassing judgments on good art versus bad art.

Another interviewee, who is a digital painter by profession, states:

Although the community has a high number of members to their participation in discussions is minimal and that debate is often fanatical, intransigent and often people who consider themselves the sole masters of truth.

If you disagree, speak up your mind and want to show the other side of the argument, then a tremendous mess is made that comes most often with verbal abuse, cursing and in the end the moderator has to intervene, in most cases resulting in expulsion of the member.

And the debate does not lead to any conclusion at all.

From the previous excerpt, the participant seems to believe that the lack of critical debate leading to a sort of conclusion and the fact that the levels of knowledge construction remain in the low phases might be the cause of so few people participating in the forum. This participant, as a professional artist himself, appears to be placing importance on the lack of constructive debate and, therefore, expresses his negative take on this matter.

Also, there is a general idea that the number of members does not necessarily relate to a higher diversity of opinion or richness of discussion. The following excerpt was taken from an interview with a participant, also an artist by trade, and he brings another typical notion innate to conversations in the forum, which is that the few people who participate do so for the sake of the survival of the whole community, were it not for them, the community would literally die:

Although the community has more than 40.000 people, with few exceptions, the level of knowledge of art there is very low and generally conservative, but like I said, there are some exceptions, some do not even participate anymore.

[...]

The number of community members is illusory, the community is maintained just by a few people, I would say not even 20 people, and if for some reason these people refrain stop participating, as has happened with many others communities (an example is a community called "Contemporary Art", which was very active and which is now dead, it happened because a few key members left) and the community dies of starvation.

On the other hand, from interviewees that consider art to be a hobby, something they are fond of but that does not define them, and is not their profession, those participants seem to have a far more positive view on the interactions and how users are engaging with art in the forum, and are far less critical. The following statement comes from a part-time artist, who dedicates himself to art in his spare time:

The community may not reflect those at the top of the pyramid artistic (if I may say so), but it sure is a picture of who is at the base in this country because as I said, is a group of people and artists at different stages of artistic evolution, from beginners to people who are already in the art world for over 30 years.

It is the true Tower of Babel, it is up to each of which can contribute to and absorb what is valid.

I have learned a lot in the community!

Participants elaborate on the *real* meaning of art and what it should be. And conversations go so on based on individual opinions, with few referring to the outside, offline world, the current market or current developments in the art world. Participants are happy to discuss Rembrandt, Caravaggio, van Gogh, Renoir, Monet, Da Vinci, Bouguereau, Velasquez, Vermeer, Dali, Modigliani, Milet, Picasso, because then everybody can just agree and move on with a polite conversation, where everybody can build on their own social capital and network, talking about what they know and is broadly recognized as *good*.

Hence, it becomes apparent that knowledge may not be an end in itself, but a tool that serves as social glue in the community, a construction of social capital rather than a construction of knowledge. Also, it is interesting to note that most of the artists used as consensus of what good art should be like are non-Brazilians, and internationally prominent. This hints to the fact that the art consumption by the active participants of the community might be more internationally oriented than localized.

The following excerpts, taken from different ongoing conversations, illustrate some of the relationships of relating “Brazilian” notions and values with art, in the way is most commonly understood in this community: mostly conservative and internationally normative. Even though those are not responding to each other, or connected in a continuum of knowledge sharing and community bonding over a general agreement of good art, they end up positing a general tone to the forum, as they seem to be typical discourse.

Brenda:

Brazil is a country with a sort of "animalistic" culture...

everything has sexual connotation... and at times of immediate pleasures (drinking, drugs)

the middle class is a cancer... just struggle for self-interest and the rest of the nation may as well be damned...

there is no cold winter, if they are unemployed, homeless, they do not freeze to death in the streets.. do not feel pressured to fight for life.. that's the reason for this reputation of a "rascal"...

and they have no difficulties in life, no concrete goals to be achieved.. an empty mind is the devil's workshop... wants to vary, ephemeral pleasures, more.. like a spoiled child... then they form "tribes" to differentiate themselves in the crowd, 'cause not happy to be normal.. become EMO, become gothic, punk, reggae .. haha [...]

And these ideals, goals, the struggle for survival that most great artists had in their lives, which served as inspiration for creating great works of art, originality, idea and content that are really worth it to be maintained over the centuries... I am not saying that you need to beat them up and starve them in order to become a decent artist... NO, but it helped them to fight for their ideals more ;-)

Snakey:

Originality ...

It is when the artist does not steal bases or other arts.

What do I fake paintings, badly painted, with ridiculous imitations of pictures, clocks of Salvador Dali, Magritte fruit. Anyone who can paint can mix colors... now I want to see the original drawing and painting, their proposals ideas.

But if imitation is a well-made one, and not a garbage full of elements copied, it can be appreciated...

There seems to be an awareness of the need of a "Brazilian" art identity and that there is a recognition of a certain past dominance of some kinds of art that have dominated the taste and the norms of what is considered art. While this type of remark is common to see in the forum, with an importance placed on originality, and the need to cause emotion on the

audiences, there are also other types of comments that counterbalance that, placing importance on the need for technique, and on the need to resemble *good* art, as it is traditionally perceived.

Wagner:

Now, jokes aside, what I was saying is that, in the current scenario where anything can be art, also anyone can be an artist.

Anyone who intends to produce art is automatically an artist, for the current standard

David, search on Google images for "Basquiat," which will give you a fright! or be very sad, whatever! hahahaha

Basquiat is one of those famous artists, religious and so on.

And because of artists like him I say that today, anyone who intends to make art is an artist, period.

I'm not saying that I think it is right or wrong, just to quoting the current rules of the game.

David:

Roberto, Yeah, got it?

art really is not only ability to paint, to have the technique, is far more and demands much more.

I, for example, to date, have yet to decipher what makes a piece of work become really a piece of art!

Except for the pope Renoir, I love van Gogh and Bouguereau.

But Bouguereau was far better than in Van Gogh in technique. But that was it. And it was lovely just like that.

Great Van Gogh, convey emotion. Would it be on purpose? I think not. But it could!!!!

And Bouguereau, he charms us. This is the primary concept of art.

Just LOOK, no rules, no explanations, no labels, just emotion.

And the unknown of not having an explanation.

THIS IS THE TRUE ART.

Regarding the interactions and contributions to the forum, there is sort of an anti-democratic aspect and perceptions, though. As one of the interviewees states in the following excerpt, there seems to be a sort of hierarchy that takes over the forum, where some people may contribute and others may simply “listen”:

In my opinion, a community as the "Artes Plásticas Brasil" has a big problem, and that sooner or later will be one of the reasons for its end, too many people, and worse, without any criteria, everyone comes in, self-proclaimed artists, understand or believe something about art and the person already feels entitled to an opinion that, with rare exceptions, are poor, it ends up discouraging those who intend to participate in a serious way.

There are always a few who take seriously the discussions there, I even at times when I felt that people were serious, but this is rare, most often it's just people wanting to seem something they are not.

5.3.1. The Romero Britto debate

Romero Britto is a Brazilian prominent neo-pop artist, inside the country and also internationally. He has been active with projects and exhibits in Europe and in the United States – recently with an exhibit at the Time Warner Center –, and is often mentioned in global media as a fine example of a Brazilian contemporary artist, who made it into the art world, both in Brazil and internationally. It is important to mention that he has been considered by some art critics as being too commercial, while other critics acknowledge his talent and status as a Brazilian artist

making true Brazilian art internationally. During the time frame of analysis of the forum, there were two separate threads that were explicitly about Britto's persona and his work.

It is interesting to note that, while some participants in the community acknowledge his talent, most of them still criticize the way in which he may be selling out, and just focusing on sales, not in true art. Active participants seem to agree that Brazilian art is not well valued in Brazil, and that it is a necessity to expand and sell and become internationally successful there. Nevertheless, there is heavy criticism towards the ones who succeed, as we can see by some posts excerpts below.

In those threads, he was often mentioned starting point regarding the legitimacy of his art versus the commercial aspect of his work. The following image, portrait of current Brazilian president Dilma Russef, which was given as a gift for her in a media covered event ⁷, was captured from the discussion thread:

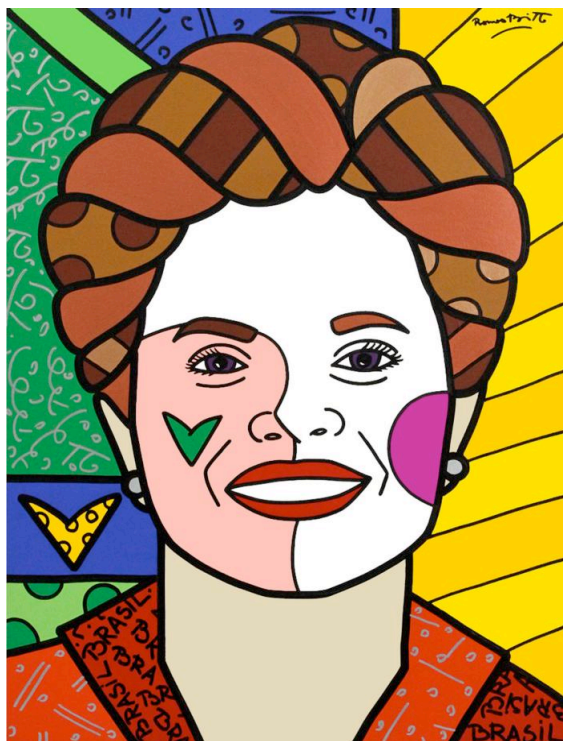


Figure 1: The piece is titled *Dilma Russef*, Brazilian president, by Romero Britto. Retrieved from the forum of the online community.

⁷ Romero Britto has also sold his work to Madonna, Bill Clinton and other celebrities in the past.

There was the creation of group consensus and bonding on what constitutes as bad art, as well, not only good art, which tended to increase the levels of critical thinking and knowledge construction according to the Gunawardena et al (1997) framework to the from the first level (Sharing / Comparing knowledge) to the second level (Discover / Explore disagreements).

Vagabond:

I just feel Romero Britto is tiresome and without a soul ... but hey, it's just my opinion there.

Don Juan Marti:

I agree with you Vagabond.

Brenda: I agree with you as well [2]

Xandoomas:

I too agree with you! Romero, who has seen one, has seen them all.

Juan:

Art has to have soul.

Romero Britto I've seen several of his pieces live and no, it did not "touch" me.

I do not want to be in his place, no.

Andrew AnLub:

Paintings are redundant, but the masses enjoy!

Don Juan Marti:

You should see the disgusting panel made with ceramic inserts that is in the lobby of the Cancer Institute in Sao Paulo.

Am I required to see this lack of taste, creativity, composition, color, theme and proportion and everything else once a month when I do my medical care.

I would like to know how and to who got the bribe.

Jonas:

Regardless of all this blah blah blah, I think David earns a lot of money every month with Romero Britto reproductions and so on.

In my humble opinion I think he is very weak, but is necessary, like many other things out there. Lady Gaga mentioned, very good analogy. I will end here, for I have nothing more to say about it.

But David, as a lover of classic as you can enjoy both the creative talents and also the mediocreness of Romero Britto? It is only by his image of success or even by his works? For those who like Van Gogh, Caravaggio, etc.. I find it a bit odd.

Juan:

I think the whole package, "artist", it is worth considering what you think and what ideas the artist defends. This reflects a lot in his work that, in a sense, has no depth, nor has a soul.

I admire Romero Britto as an enterprise. As an artist, no, do not recognize him as an artist.

Some say may come with an argument for example that Toulouse-Lautrec used his art in an advertising context and was still considered a great artist, but I see this case as being completely separate.

The artist can not stop, they must be restless. Must be exhausted to think and breathe in front of a canvas and especially should never be completely satisfied.

What is lacking in Romero Britto's evolution, he cultivates the same thing for years. Why? Because he does not want to get rid of the goose that lays golden eggs, style for which he himself created.

When Comparing styles and merits, this participant downplays Brazilian visual artist Romero Britto in comparison with "legitimate" use of Toulouse-Lautrec's art in advertising, the latter being more correct than the former.

And the debate goes on:

David

IT'S WHAT I'VE ALWAYS SAID.

Romero Britto, comes from a humble family with many siblings, and so deserves the success it has.

He was not mesmerized by all the money he makes.

I had the pleasure to send him a prototype of sculpture, which has already posted here when I was approached by the brother of Romero Britto, Robson Britto.

Who takes care, along with the other sister, of his interests in Brazil.

And what impressed me most was just his humble self, and care and concern he has for our children.

It seems questionable reasoning. If the participant is relating being poor with being worthy of success, that illustrates the underdog notion, poor childhood, etc., that resonates with the previous claim (Brenda) that artists must suffer in order to help them better express their art. In case he did not imply a causality relationship between those two facts, then it seems of little relevance to mention that he had an underprivileged childhood, in this specific type of context, where the focus is his success.

Being worthy of admiration because he is one of the very few Brazilian contemporary artists that "made it to the international art world", regardless of the perceived quality of his work, the seems to be a consensus in the community that it is not very good, not very deep, even soul-less, but worthy of admiration because of the person.

When assigning value to art, participants seem to stick to traditional ways of thinking of low art and high art, without necessarily taking the time to debate and construct knowledge on what would such art be, when literature also questions that same reasoning (Cohen, 1999). Also, participants leave the impression that a conservative view is always the best to adopt, even though it is hard to say whether they do so for acceptance within the community itself, as a form of building on their own social capital; or they indeed believe that.

Such argument is a hard one to make, as conversations and debates often stay in the low phases of critical thinking, usually progressing around the first levels, namely: 1. Sharing / Comparing knowledge; and 2. Discover / Explore disagreements.

Going back to the Brazilian art identity versus international notions and paradigms of good art, the following excerpt touches on a locality issue, placing importance on geographical origin (of a piece of art, or indeed, of the artist himself):

Lourdes:

Helio how about that!

You are northeastern yourself, from Recife, speaking evil of your neighbor Pernambuco LOL I do not understand... If you don't like it at least be quiet about it, because he [Romero Britto] has given great joys to Pernambuco. All in the Northeast should have many practical branded cheap products to sell as you said. More of Romero not only are prices that anyone can buy.

On the other hand, there is the regional aspect of the following comment (above), where the participant expects another user, who eat from the same geographical part of the Romero Britto Brazil, to support the artist just because he eat from the Same background the poor Poorest city in the region of Brazil. This May Seem contradiction compared to the comments negatively evaluating Brazilian art that sells well - the views These Encourage and praise the support of Brazilian That artists are making big money abroad just for the sake of Supporting a fellow Brazilian. However, this fact reinforces a view in the Brazilian idea of the underdog, the one that does not stand on its own merits, an art that has to rely on nationalism and patriotism to be regarded positively.

5.4. -To what extent does an online forum serve as an alternative space for participation in the art world in Brazil?

In the attempt to investigate to what extent the online community “Artes Plásticas Brasil” serves as an alternative space for participation in the art world in Brazil, it becomes apparent that alternative might not be the appropriate term for the phenomena observed. From the data, it is possible to infer that the community works more as an *extension* of the offline art world rather than as an alternative to it.

The community certainly works as a novel space for participation in the art world, however, data collected by the survey shows that the people who are participating actively in the community are actually also participating in the *offline* art world by attending art museums and galleries. That means the people who are part of the seven percent of Brazilian population that have actually been to a museum before, and the four percent that have the habit of attending art museums and galleries might be the same as the ones taking part in the community forum. Hence, we cannot talk about *alternative* here.

Furthermore, an extension of the offline art world seems to be true for the community because even though active participants said they have been to an art museum or gallery once or more in the last 12 months, participation in the art world, as was stated in the beginning of this study, has two dimensions. One of which being the contact with works of art, and that dimension is satisfied by the offline, live contact with art they obtain by physically attending those places. However, the community allows for the second dimension of participation to occur, which is to be able to debate and discuss art related issues, which makes the community the extension of the offline art world for those participants.

When it comes to the debate of the local and the global, the community touches on the idiosyncrasies of Brazilian art and contemporary Brazilian art, and what is understood by it. Nevertheless, discussions around it do not seem to explore the tension in deeper levels, but merely make statements about what is good art, and typically that comes with examples that are non-Brazilian.

6. Conclusion

When I started this study, my aim was to investigate to what extent an online virtual community was capable of being an alternative site for participation in the art world. In the online community “Artes Plásticas Brasil”, participants were engaging with art on the forum and I expected to find deliberation about art, some degree of knowledge construction and investment in social capital.

The online community “Artes Plásticas Brasil” was studied and its forum posts observed in the timeframe of one year, while the author joined the community as observant while sieving through the relevant posts and contributions. No contributions were made to the forum by the researcher, except when I introduced myself and asked for collaboration to the online survey. This thesis obtained some insight into whom is the user engaging with art in online forums. People who engage in online deliberation about art are artists themselves in their majority, some of them as a primary occupation, some as a spare time activity, some are students trying to get a feel for the market, some are art teachers, and from the survey, most of them do not work in any art related field, and are there because they like to take part in an art-related space, even if just as spectators.

The average active user does not seem to be someone necessarily involved in the lively Brazilian art world, as world media puts it. Rather, the active users seem to be somehow ‘displaced’ from the main geographic epicenters of art in Brazil (major capital cities such as Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro), where *everything* happens (Campbell, 2011). This external perspective is often from a smaller town in further areas of the country or, at times, outside the country even, as was the case with two of the interviewees, who lived in Germany and in the United States.

Furthermore, this *physical displacement* of the users happens the other way around as well, with individuals who are not Brazilian actively interacting and engaging in online debate about (Brazilian) art, from countries such as Italy and Spain, who are currently living in Brazil and use the online community to integrate, then their geographical displacement has put them in the Brazilian online sphere. Nevertheless, the community seems to provide a channel for that participation.

It seems the online community constitutes a link, or a space where the users – the artists – with little voice in the *real* art world can voice their views and contribute to a debate. Even though official institutions such as museums, art curators and the like do not seem to be there, interaction amongst artists and interested people is attractive to those who, for one reason or the other, would otherwise be left *out of the loop*, for example, based on geographical location. Furthermore, the participants seem to be conservative and traditional in their notions of art and, to a degree, reluctant to accept and assess unconventional and new ideas of art. For instance, digital art was still highly criticized in the forum, while the big international names of the last centuries were typically praised.

Users who have in art their primary occupation tend to take debates and interactions far more seriously than those who have art as a hobby, pastime or recreational activity. Users who have art as a spare time activity tend to evaluate the community in a positive way, acknowledging that they learn with it and that it contributes positively to their overall knowledge in art.

Regarding Brazilian art, the conversations in the forum hint at it being regarded as somewhat hybrid and aggregative, others say it is just like any good art being made anywhere else in the world, as 'good' should transcend national definitions. Still, the idea that Brazilian art is colorful and connected to some sort of craftsmanship is noted as well. In the global versus local debate, it seems to be that consumption of art by the community active participants is very much guided by international art production.

Concerning the relationship between art expert and non-experts, and a possible democratization of knowledge about art, the interactions in the online community seem to feature self anointed expertise and a somewhat anti-democratic way of assigning such expertise. Self-proclaimed experts try to convey their views and opinions, while non-experts seem to just want to take part in the process. From the data, it appears that the social capital accumulated through experience and active participation in the forum is more valuable and has more weight than actual expertise and knowledge about art. Participants will give attention to members who they already know over members they do not know yet, regardless of the content of their contributions.

In fact, the investment in one's social capital seems to be a great motivation for participation on this online community, as participants seem to be aware of the investment they are putting in when they comment, contribute or display their work, and they value the (new)

connections they make through the forum. As any sort of capital, social capital loses value when not used, then users keep engaging in debate, keep promoting their work, keep contributing regardless of the nature of the contribution, as if there is a common understanding of the importance of maintaining it, and reciprocating it with others.

Even though the entry to the community itself is not selective, anybody can join, through participation and contributions, users gather the online social capital and make their connections, to the point that there is a hierarchy built there, not the traditional order that takes place in the *offline* art world, with critics, curators, experts and reputable artists in their clear roles, respectively. In the large online community, artists are mistaken for critics, who are mistaken for curators, who are mistaken for artists and, as one interviewee happily said, “anybody can be an artist”, which hints to the fact that they may wish to be seen as such – especially in the online world, where users are not asked to prove their statements, but merely, defend them. Regarding the democratization debate, it seems the more participants post, the more potential they have to be considered an expert and hence, *right*. Likewise, the less a member participants, the more potential they have to be considered *wrong* by the others.

Regarding how the construction of knowledge takes place, we can establish that it happens in a dynamic construct as the forum itself can be read as a blank canvas, which users can fill with their own paints and colors, if that analogy indeed seems appropriate. The more reputable active and popular participants, with all their social capital at hand, the more they will contribute with stronger and more vivid brush strokes to the painting. Those who do not participate so often, the ones who have not gathered enough social capital, they will also add their colors, but those will be used to fill the background and give texture, filling small gaps in blank space, however, they will not contribute much to the main picture and the final image of the piece of work, which will be shaped by the ones who *talk* more. Hence, the knowledge construction is not democratic, in one sense of the term, as some voices are more valued than others.

All in all, the online community “Artes Plásticas Brasil” seems to provide an extension of participation in the art world in Brazil. Rather than just an alternative space for it, it seems to be allowing a novel space for interactions, as most of the active users are among the Brazilians who indeed do attend art galleries and museums, and use the forum as an extension of that space.

6.1. Implications

As a direct implication of this finding, there is the fact that the construction of knowledge about art in this online community is not necessarily democratic, as it is very much reliant on how much investment, e.g. time and effort, one is willing to put in the construct of their online self and their discourse / argument. The amount of time, contributions and connections a user obtains is directly proportional to how much their opinion is valued and how much they are entitled to deliver their discourse, even disrespecting other members. Such disrespect is allowed by the community, not only participants by also moderation, as long as there is a feeling of activity, a feeling of active community and reciprocation of social capital, which is regarded as important indicator for participation and popularity of contributions.

This study does not extinguish itself with this thesis and recommendation for further investigation, especially in the construction of knowledge in art-related online communities in Brazil, would certainly benefit from a broader study and research involving more than one community, and a larger number of participants.

7. References

Amaral, Ana Lucia, 1991. Cultural capital and school success: A study of Brazilian normal schools. Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, Graduate School of Education.

Arora, P., & Vermeulen, F. (2011). *The rise of the new experts: Consumers and the art world in the digital age*. (Forthcoming)

Bennett, T., Savage, M., Silva, E., Warde, A., Gayo-Cal, M. & Wright, D. (2008). Culture, Class, Distinction. Chapter 1 "Culture after Distinction", pp.9-23

Bourdieu, P. (1984). Distinction. A social critique of the judgment of taste. New York/London: Routledge.

Campbell, U. (2009) Mais da metade das cidades brasileiras não oferecem atividades culturais gratuitas. *Jornal Correio Braziliense*. 18/12/2009. Available at: http://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/brasil/2009/12/18/interna_brasil,161718/index.shtml

Carifio, J. & Perla, R.C. (2007). Ten Common Misunderstandings, Misconceptions, Persistent Myths and Urban Legends about Likert Scales and Likert Response Formats and their Antidotes. *Journal of Social Sciences* 3 (3): 106-116, 2007 ISSN 1549-3652

Daniel, B., Schwier, R., & McCalla, G. (2003). Social capital in virtual learning communities and distributed communities of practice. *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology*, 29(3), 113-139.

Chadwick, A. (2006). *Internet Politics: States, citizens, and New Communication Technologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cohen, T. (1993). High and Low Thinking about High and Low Art. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 51, No. 2, Aesthetics: Past and Present. A Commemorative Issue Celebrating 50 Years of The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism and the American Society for Aesthetics (Spring, 1993). Blackwell, pp. 151-156

- Cohen, T. (1999). High and Low Art, and High and Low Audiences. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 57, No. 2, Aesthetics and Popular Culture (Spring, 1999). Blackwell, pp. 137-143
- Corbin, J.M & Strauss, A.L. (2008) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. 3rd Ed.
- Durand, J.C. (1999). Public and Private art Funding in Brazil. *The Privatization of Culture Project for Research on Cultural Policy*.
- Durand, J.C. (1989). *arte, Privilégio e Distinção. artes Plásticas, Arquitetura e Classe Dirigente no Brasil, 1855-1985*. S.Paulo, Pioneira/Edusp.
- Elo, S. & Kyngas, H . (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 62(1), 107–115 doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x
- Gunawardena, L., Lowe, C., & Anderson, T. (1997). Interaction analysis of a global on-line debate and the development of a constructivist interaction analysis model for computer conferencing. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 17(4), 395-429.
- Kanuka, H. & Anderson, T. (1998). Online social interchange, discord and knowledge construction. *Journal of Distance Education*. 13(1) 57-74.
- Kim, J. (2006) The impact of Internet use patterns on political engagement: A focus on online deliberation and virtual social capital. *Information Polity* 11 (2006) 35–49 IOS Press
- Livingstone, S. (2004). The challenge of changing audiences : or, what is the researcher to do in the age of the internet? [online]. London: LSE Research Online. Available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/archive/00000412>
- Wengraf, T. (2001) *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods*. Sage
- Falk, J. & Dierking, L. (1992). *The Museum Experience*. Washington: Whalesback Books.
- Flichy, P. (2006). New Media History. In Lievrouw, L. & Livingstone, S. (Eds.), *Handbook of new media. Social shaping and social consequences of ICTs*. Updated Student Edition (pp.187-204) London: Sage Publications.

Fragoso, S. (2006). WTF a crazy Brazilian invasion. In F.Sudweeks&H.Hrachovec (Eds.), Proceedings of CATaC 2006 (pp. 255–274). Murdoch, Australia: Murdoch University.

Funch, B.S. (1993). Educating the Eye: Strategies for Museum Education. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring, 1993), pp. 83-98

Gazeta do Povo (2011). Artista plástico Romero Britto dá pintura de presente a Dilma. Published on 14/02/2011. Available at:

<http://www.gazetadopovo.com.br/vidapublica/conteudo.phtml?tl=1&id=1096691&tit=Artista-plastico-Romero-Britto-da-pintura-de-presente-a-Dilma>

Glaserfeld, E. (1989). Cognition, construction of knowledge, and teaching. *Synthese* Volume 80, Number 1. Springer, 121-140.

Hine, C. (200). *Virtual Ethnography*. London: Sage.

Jenkins, H. (2004). The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Volume 7(1): 33–43

Kling, R. (2007). *What is social informatics and why does it matter?* The Information Society. Routledge

Küng, L. (2008) *Strategic Management in the Media: theory to practice*. London: Sage.

Kuspit, D. (2004). *The End of Art*. Cambridge University Press.

Lievrouw, L. (2006). New Media Design and Development: Diffusion of Innovations v Social Shaping of Technology. In Lievrouw, L. & Livingstone, S. (Eds.), *Handbook of new media. Social shaping and social consequences of ICTs. Updated Student Edition* (pp.243-265) London: Sage Publications.

Livingstone, S. (2004). The challenge of changing audiences: or, what is the audience researcher to do in the age of the Internet? *European Journal of Communication*, 19(1), 75-86

Marcolini, B. (2009). Você consome cultura?. In *Ciência Hoje On-line* 28/07/2009. Available at <http://cienciahoje.uol.com.br/noticias/economia/voce-consome-cultura>

Manovich, L. (2001). *The Language of New Media*. Massachusetts and London: MITPress.

McMillan, S. J. (2006). Exploring Models of Interactivity from Multiple Research Traditions: Users, Documents and Systems. In L. & Lievrouw, Handbook of new media. Social shaping and social consequences of ICTs. Updated Student Edition (pp. 205-229). London: Sage Publications.

McRobbie, A. (2005). "Needs and norms". Bourdieu and Cultural Studies. In: A. McRobbie. The uses of cultural studies. London: Sage, 121-150.

Morais, C. and D. Rocha. (2005). Porque existe tanto brasileiro no Orkut? Ou as Redes sociais e o Homem Cordial. In: Congresso Brasileiro de Ciências da Comunicação, 28., 2005. Rio de Janeiro. Anais... São Paulo: Intercom, 2005. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1904/17829>

O'Reilly, T. & Battelle, J. (2009). Web Squared: Web 2.0 Five Years On. Special Report for Web2.0 Summit, San Francisco, CA.

O'Reilly, T. (2005). What is Web 2.0? Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software.

OECD (2007). Participative web: User created content. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007: 4 – 20

Rafaelli, S., Ravid, I. & Soroka, V. (2004). De-lurking in virtual communities: a social communication network approach to measuring the effects of social and cultural capital. in:

System Sciences, 2004. Proceedings of the 37th Annual Hawaii International Conference on

Date of Conference: 5-8 Jan. 2004

Recuero, R. (2005). O capital social em redes sociais na Internet. Revista FAMECOS, 28, 88-106. (Social Capital in Internet Social Networks)

Recuero, R.C. (2006). Dinâmicas de Redes Sociais no Orkut e Capital Social (UCPEL/UFRGS)

Rheingold, H. (1993) *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley

Shilton, K. & Srinivasan, R. (2007). Counterpoint. Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement for Multicultural Archival Collections. Multicultural Archives.

Srinivasan, R. & Huang, J . (2005). Fluid Ontologies for Digital Museums . From the issue entitled "Special section on Digital Museum" Volume 5 number 3. Springer.

Srinivasan,R., Becvar, K.M., Boast, R. &Enote, J. (2010) Diverse Knowledges and Contact Zones within the Digital Museum. 21 May 2010. Sage Publications.

Schweibenz, W. (1998). The "Virtual Museum": New Perspectives For Museums to Present Objects and Information Using the Internet as a Knowledge Base and Communication System. In: Zimmermann, Harald H.; Schramm, Volker (Eds.): Knowledge Management und Kommunikationssysteme, Workflow Management, Multimedia, Knowledge Transfer. Proceedings des 6. Internationalen Symposiums für Informationswissenschaft (ISI 1998), Prag, 3. – 7. November 1998. Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1998. S. 185 – 200

Temple, B. & Young, A. (2004) Qualitative Research and Translation Dilemmas. Qualitative Research 2004 4: 161 DOI: 10.1177/14687941040444430 Available at:
<http://qrj.sagepub.com/content/4/2/161>

Thomsen, S.R., Straubhaar, J.D. & Bolyard, D.M. (1998). Ethnomethodology and the study of online communities: exploring the cyber streets. *Information Research*, 4(1) Available at:
<http://informationr.net/ir/4-1/paper50.html>

Twinn, S. (1997). An exploratory study examining the influence of translation on the validity and reliability of qualitative data in nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 1997, 26, 418–423

Turner, G. (2003). The idea of cultural studies. In: G. Turner. *British cultural studies An introduction*. Third edition. London: Routledge, 9-32.

UNESCO <http://www.unesco.org/new/pt/brasil/cultura/access-to-culture/>

PNC - Consulta Pública das Metas do Plano Nacional de Cultura (PNC)
<http://pnc.culturadigital.br/>

Verboord, M. (2009). The legitimacy of book critics in the age of the Internet and omnivorosity: Expert critics, Internet critics and peer critics in Flanders and the Netherlands. *European Sociological Review*, Advance Access, published online August 3, 2009.

Webster, F. (2006). The Information Society Revisited. In: *The Handbook of New Media*. Updated Student Edition. Lievrouw, L. & Livingstone, S. (Eds.) London: Sage, pp.443-457

8. Appendix

A) Online Survey Script, taken from the software tool Qualtrics, where it was hosted.

—

Hello! Welcome and thank you for taking a few minutes to answer this survey, which is part of my master's thesis on 'Media, Culture and Society'.

I would like to assure you that all data collected will be treated completely anonymous, i.e. your name, address or document will not be asked.

I ask you to answer all questions honestly, and rest assured that the information will be treated confidentially, used exclusively for the above-mentioned academic purposes and will not be shared with any third parties.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns, feel free to write me at: fabiola@student.eur.nl

Thank you!
Fabiola Andrade

Are you a member of the Orkut community "Artes Plásticas Brasil"?

- Yes
- No

Consider the last 12 months. Within that period, how often did you access the community "Artes Plásticas Brasil", approximately?

*Consider your access to read the forum, even if not posting anything.

- everyday, more than once a day
- everyday
- 2 to 3 times a week
- once a week
- once every 2 weeks
- once a month
- less than once a month

Why do you participate in the community "Artes Plásticas Brasil"?

- To keep informed about the world of the arts in Brazil (production of art, events, exhibitions, etc.).
- To keep informed about the world of the Arts, the world (market, international trends, etc.).
- To promote my work and find potential business contacts (networking)
- To discuss and argue about concepts related to Art
- To exchange information and experiences
- To learn and / or expand theoretical or technical
- To make new friends, connections and / or contacts
- Other (please specify)

Check according to your perceptions of the community:

I think the conversations and debates on the forum in general, are productive
I learned new things in the community
I made new social contacts through the community
I feel that the community offers its members a way to participate in the world of Art

Totally disagree
Partially disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Partially agree
Totally agree

Now I would like to ask you about your offline habits. Shall we continue?

In the last 12 months, did you visit any art gallery or art museum?

Yes
 No

In the last 12 months, how many times did you visit an art museum or art gallery?

once
 2 to 3 times
 3 to 5 times
 5 to 10 times
 More than 10 times

What influenced your decision to go to art museums or art galleries?

geographical proximity / convenience
 Gratuity or affordability of the event
 Interest in a certain artist
 A specific event (i.e., a lecture, or round-table with guests, etc.)
 Another reason - please specify

You mentioned you haven't visited any art museums or art gallery in the last 12 months. What were the reasons for that?

Lack of options in your region
 Entrance fee non-affordable / too expensive
 Lack of interest
 Another reason – please specify

Do you take part in any study group or discussion group, which does not take place through the Internet (i.e. offline)?

*Not directly related to your work or study

Yes
 No

You mentioned that part of a study group or a discussion group on art that is not based on the Internet. Use the space below to briefly describe this group (as is, where the theme, how often the group meets, etc.).

In this last part, I would like to know a little about yourself.

I need this information to track the demographics of the community.

As I said before, I will not ask any information that identifies you and treat all data on an anonymous and

confidential, so I kindly ask you to answer all questions truthfully.

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

In what year were you born?

What is your nationality?

In the last 12 months, did you live in Brazil?

- Yes
- No

In which country have you lived in the last 12 months?

In which city and State / county / province do you currently live (in Brazil or elsewhere)?

Do you work with Art, i.e., is your job art-related?

- Yes
- No

What is your relationship with Art?

*in case there are more than one, please, chose the dominant one.

- Teacher / instructor
- Commercial / supplier
- Artist
- Curator
- Critic
- Personal interest
- Student
- Hobby
- Other – please, specify

What is the highest educational level completed by you?

- Primary school
- High school
- Vocational school
- Bachelor degree
- Master / PhD

B) Topic list for the interviews

What is your relationship with art (professional, interest, hobby, etc.)?.

Why did you join the community "Arts Brazil" (yours reasons, motivations, etc.)?.

How do you feel about the interactions in the community forum? Why? Cite examples, if possible.

Do you feel you can learn something from the community forum? To what extent? Cite examples, if possible.

Do you feel that what happens in the community "Arts Brazil" can be a picture or a mini-cosmos of what happens in the world of the arts in Brazil? In what senses?

What do you think of Brazilian Contemporary Art in general? Please explain.

Do you participate in other discussion groups about art, online or offline? How often? Why?